

SURGE

THE PULSE OF GAMING

EWOK
POACHING,
GALACTIC
SKIRMISHES,
AND TWO
TRILOGIES!

STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT



OUT OF CONTROL!
Gamepad torture test



GIRLS & GAMING
The forgotten gender



MMORIP?
Not as massive as you think

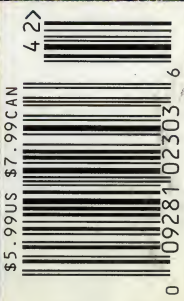


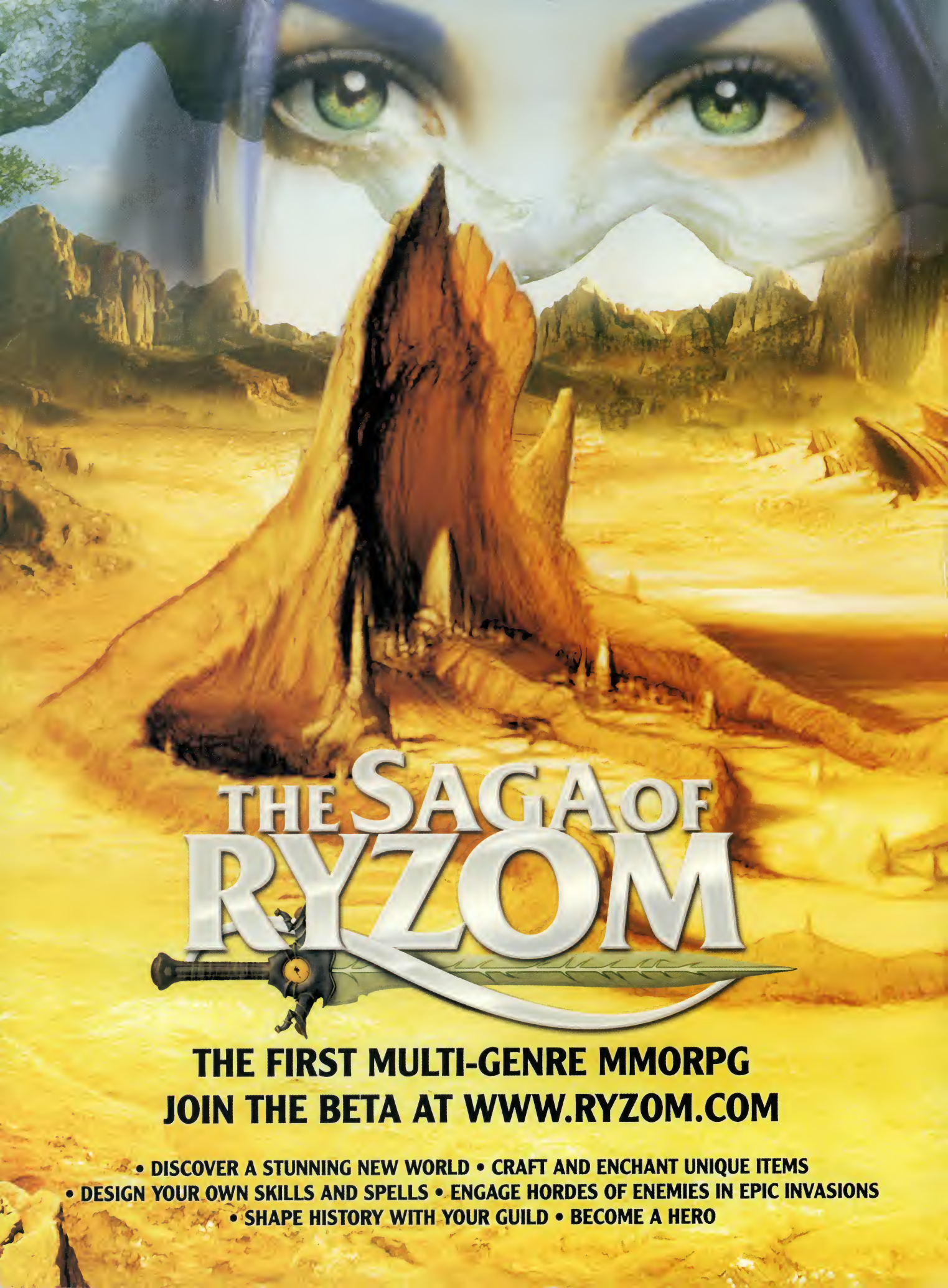
THE SHINS
Rockin' the vids

E3 BLOWOUT!

- Battlefield 2
- Final Fantasy XII
- X-Men Legends
- The Getaway 2
- Madden NFL 2005
- God of War
- Dukes of Hazzard

02303
SUMMER 2004
WWW.SURGEMAG.COM





THE SAGA OF RYZOM

THE FIRST MULTI-GENRE MMORPG
JOIN THE BETA AT WWW.RYZOM.COM

- DISCOVER A STUNNING NEW WORLD • CRAFT AND ENCHANT UNIQUE ITEMS
- DESIGN YOUR OWN SKILLS AND SPELLS • ENGAGE HORDES OF ENEMIES IN EPIC INVASIONS
- SHAPE HISTORY WITH YOUR GUILD • BECOME A HERO

"Ryzom could be the answer to your massively multi-player prayers"

PC Gamer



NEVRAX

jolt
online gaming
SERVERS POWERED BY JOLT



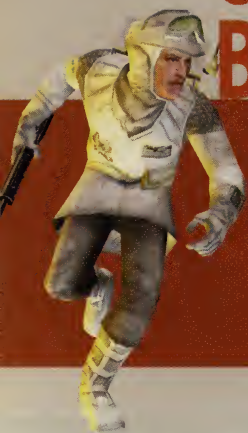
© 2004 NevraX. The Saga of Ryzom is developed by NevraX. Hosted in America by Jolt Online Gaming. American Community Support by Themis Group.
All brands, product names and logos are trademarks or registered trademarks of their respective owners. All rights reserved.

40

Cover Story

Star Wars Battlefront

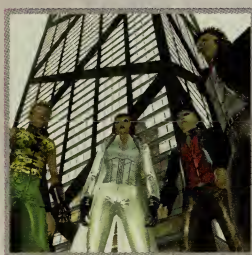
LucasArts and Pandemic are bringing the *Star Wars* universe to the multiplayer arena with *Battlefront*.



52

Love and Rockets

How can the industry start catering to women gamers? We asked our favorite female figureheads in the game biz.



66

Showdown on the Diamond

Which baseball game reigns supreme in 2004? We uncorked all the bats and tested all the games for steroids to find a true winner.



60

MMORIP?

Can the genre survive low subscription numbers?

72

Controller Torture Test

Now this is how you test a game controller. No one said we were nice people.



10 The Lobby

When writing letters to the editor, there are no bad questions except stupid questions. Or something like that.

14 The Wire

The Xbox Live update, Samus on the big screen, and using your brain whilst playing games—literally.

18 GameLife

Everyone says they would love to test games for a living, but what do game testers have to say about their jobs? It may surprise you.

20 Profile: Trauma Studios

After wowing the mod community with *Desert Combat*, Trauma Studios has landed a sweet deal with the original *Battlefield* team, DICE. Who says volunteer work doesn't pay?

78 Load

Check out our previews for intel on the hottest upcoming games.

- 78 Armies of Exigo
- 78 GoldenEye 2
- 79 Astro Boy
- 79 Battlefield 2
- 80 Battlefield: Modern Combat
- 80 Call of Duty: United Offensive
- 81 NBA Live 2005
- 81 Madden NFL 2005

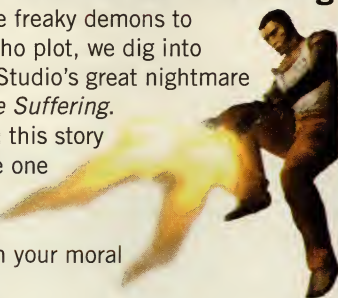


- 82 The Dukes of Hazzard: Return of the General Lee
- 83 Final Fantasy XII
- 84 Rome: Total War
- 85 God of War
- 86 Evil Genius
- 86 Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude
- 87 Mortal Kombat: Deception
- 87 Shadow Ops: Red Mercury
- 88 Star Wars: Republic Commando
- 89 Unreal Championship 2: The Liandri Conflict
- 90 Ghost Recon 2
- 90 Rainbow Six 3: Black Arrow
- 91 The Getaway 2
- 92 Men of Valor
- 93 Silent Hill 4: The Room
- 94 X-Men Legends
- 95 Spider-Man 2

22 Blueprint: The Art of Suffering

From the freaky demons to the psycho plot, we dig into Surreal Studio's great nightmare tale, *The Suffering*.

Warning: this story will have one of three endings based on your moral choices.



34 GameTech

Mmmm... technology.

- Hoojum Cubit P4
- Classic Game Boy Advance SP
- ColorWare Consoles
- Saitek R440 Force Feedback Wheel
- Sony PS2 Hard Drive
- Majesco GBA SP Neckband Style Headphones

38 Rigs

A clash of the titans between the Dell Inspiron XPS notebook and the Voodoo Envoy M:780.

96 Online

So you want to throw a LAN party? Our local area expert offers tips on how to make it a night to remember for all the right reasons.

100 Mobile

After falling flat with the N-Gage, Nokia tells us why the new QD will be different.



128 One on One

We talk music and games with indie darlings The Shins.

Play

Buy it, rent it, or steal it? You won't know until you read these reviews.



- 104 Fight Night
- 106 Battlefield Vietnam
- 107 City of Heroes



- 108 Hitman: Contracts
- 110 La Pucelle: Tactics
- 111 Lineage II
- 112 Onimusha 3: Demon Siege



- 114 Onimusha Blade Warriors
- 116 Painkiller
- 118 Resident Evil: Outbreak
- 119 Sacred
- 120 Seven Samurai 20XX
- 121 Siren
- 122 Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow



- 123 Transformers
- 124 Unreal Tournament 2004
- 126 UFC: Sudden Impact
- 127 Van Helsing



EXPERIENCE THE GREATEST SAGA EVER TOLD - YOURS.



Actual in-game engine.



Official Star Wars® Web Site
www.starwars.com



Game Experience May
Change During Online Play

LUCASFILM and the LucasArts logo are registered trademarks of Lucasfilm Ltd. Star Wars Galaxies is a trademark of Lucasfilm Entertainment Company Ltd. © 2003 Lucasfilm Entertainment Company Ltd. or Lucasfilm Ltd. & ® or TM as indicated. All rights reserved. SOE and the SOE logo are registered trademarks of Sony Online Entertainment Inc. in the United States and other countries. © 2003 Sony Online Entertainment Inc. The name NVIDIA and the NVIDIA logo are registered trademarks of NVIDIA Corporation. The terms "The way it's meant to be played" and the "NVIDIA: The way it's meant to be played" logo are trademarks of NVIDIA Corporation.



— AN —
EMPIRE DIVIDED™

Welcome to *Star Wars Galaxies*™—Massively multiplayer online gaming set in a galaxy far, far away. The Death Star has been destroyed and the galaxy is torn by civil war. Choose your allegiance - Rebel, Imperial or neutral - and immerse yourself in the *Star Wars*® universe like never before.

WWW.STARWARGALAXIES.COM





EXPERIENCE THE GREATEST SAGA EVER TOLD - YOURS.



Actual in-game engine.



Official Star Wars® Web Site
www.starwars.com



Game Experience May
Change During Online Play

LucasArts and the LucasArts logo are registered trademarks of LucasArts Ltd. Star Wars Galaxies is a trademark of LucasArts Entertainment Company, Ltd. © 2003 LucasArts Entertainment Company Ltd. or LucasArts Ltd. & 2d or 3d as indicated. All rights reserved. SOE and the SOE logo are registered trademarks of Sony Online Entertainment Inc. in the United States and other countries. The name NVIDIA and the NVIDIA logo are registered trademarks of NVIDIA Corporation. The term "The way it's meant to be played" and the "NVIDIA: The way it's meant to be played" logo are trademarks of NVIDIA Corporation.



— AN —
EMPIRE DIVIDED™

Welcome to *Star Wars Galaxies*.™ Massively multiplayer online gaming set in a galaxy far, far away. The Death Star has been destroyed and the galaxy is torn by civil war. Choose your allegiance - Rebel, Imperial or neutral - and immerse yourself in the *Star Wars*® universe like never before. This fall you'll experience even more thrilling content, with player-run cities, creature mounts and authentic vehicles. Brace yourself.

WWW.STARWARGALAXIES.COM



Anytime, Anywhere

As the current generation of consoles enters its twilight years and the big three take a deep breath before starting the next round, attention has shifted away from home entertainment to the Wild West of the gaming industry: the mobile market. Researchers and analysts see a goldmine out there, and now everyone wants a piece of the action.

Since its birth in 1989, Nintendo's Game Boy has been the only mobile gaming platform to show any consistency. After shaking off early competition from the Sega Game Gear and Atari Lynx, the Game Boy has been on cruise control, slowly but surely bringing more and more fans into the fold of its warm, Mario-infused embrace.

But now, thunder is clapping outside Camp Nintendo, which can only mean that lightning is about to strike. Sony is determined to make the "Walkman for the 21st century" out of the PSP, its new, all-in-one handheld armed with PS2-like graphics and Wi-Fi.

Meanwhile, US wireless content providers want to emulate the European and Japanese mobile space, where cell phone-based games have captured the imaginations of millions of commuters. Nokia is giving the N-Gage another shot with its new QD model (see page 100), and the Tapwave Zodiac is aimed at PDA users looking for more than just a personal information manager. The only major player in the game industry taking a pass on the mobile market is Microsoft—at least for now.

In an attempt to solidify its base against the emerging competition, Nintendo is offering the DS, a dual-screen handheld more powerful than the current Game Boy Advance or cell phone games, but allegedly falling below the PSP in terms of power and price.

A lot of questions need to be answered before we know how many of these options will be able to coexist. Will people spend more than \$200 for a multifunctional mobile device like the PSP? Will Americans take to wireless content like our neighbors abroad? And will Nintendo's DS capture the imagination or the ire of gamers?

It will be interesting to see how the chips fall, as each of these companies is taking a drastically different approach. Who's in the know? Maybe everybody. Or, maybe nobody.

Matt Bertz *Editor-in-Chief*
mbertz@surgemag.com

Editor in Chief
Matt Bertz

Managing Editor
David Crohn

Senior Editor
Mark Spoonauer

Copy Editor
Christian Smith

Staff Writer
Tal Pinchevsky

Assistant Editors
Corinne Cummings
Rob Farren

Editorial Director
David A. Finck

Contributing Editors

George T. Chronis
Andy Eddy
Russ Fischer
Adam Fleet
Jon M. Gibson
Tom Ham
Geoff Keighley
Zach Meston
Les L. Shu
Scott Steinberg
James Stevenson
Peter Suci
Stephen Totilo
Doug Trueman

Art Director
Jeffrey Sass

Designers
Bill Daniels
Shayna Marchese
Martin Rios
Nathan Sharratt

Web Editor
Dan O'Brien

Associate Publisher
Carol Berman

Director of Advertising
Kelly Immoor

Sales Managers
Justine DeGaetano
Archer Montague
Amanda Novak

Marketing Manager
Jessica Mason

Director of Production & IT
Noreen Teichner

IT Manager
Murat Turk

Publisher
Edward D. Brown

Director of Circulation
Jay Annis

Senior Bookkeeper
Maria Pubill

Assistant Bookkeepers
Lisa Brisbane
Candice Gundermann

Office Manager
Sandy Diamond

Administration
Jeannie Mitchell

Volume 1, Issue 3, 2004 copyright
SURGE (ISSN: 1547-4046) is published four times a
year by Bedford Communications, Inc.
Printed in the United States of America.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to
SURGE c/o Bedford Communications,
1410 Broadway, 21st Floor, New York, NY 10018.

To contact the editors, please email
letters@surgemag.com.

To inquire about subscriptions, please email
subscriptions@surgemag.com. The Editor welcomes
company product information for all video games.

Editorial materials should be addressed to
Matt Bertz, 1410 Broadway, 21st Floor,
New York, NY 10018. Unsolicited manuscripts
will not be returned or acknowledged.

The products listed in this magazine are subject to
manufacturers change and the publisher assumes no
responsibility for such changes.

This publication is copyrighted and may not be
reproduced without prior written notice of Bedford
Communications. For high-quality reprints,
please contact Keith Williams at
PARS International (212) 221-9595 x319.

What You Can't Hear
WILL Kill You

from above...

from
behind...

from
your left...

from your right...

Hear Every Detail in 7.1 Surround and 24-bit ADVANCED HD™ in

Splinter Cell® Pandora Tomorrow™ with

AUDIGY² ZS *and* **GIGAWORKS™ S750**

"The accurate 3D positioning from the combination of an Audigy®2 ZS and the GigaWorks™ S750 kept us from getting shot in the back more than once."

— CGW - April 2004

Tom Clancy's
**SPLINTER
CELL**
PANDORA TOMORROW



www.us.creative.com

Get
CREATIVE with PC Gaming

©2004 Creative Technology Ltd. The Creative logo is a registered trademark of Creative Technology Ltd. In the United States and/or other countries. All other brands are trademarks or registered trademarks of their respective holders.
©2004 Ubisoft Entertainment. All Rights Reserved. Splinter Cell, Sam Fisher, Splinter Cell Pandora Tomorrow, the Soldier Icon, Ubisoft, ubi.com, and the Ubisoft logo are trademarks of Ubisoft Entertainment in the U.S. and/or other countries.

The masses have spoken on the potential vaporware arriving soon, and the results are quite mixed. The truth is, no one knows how these new consoles will do in relation to the big three, and only time will tell if any of them can achieve even a modest level of success. But that didn't stop you from sounding off.

VAPORWARE, ANYONE? FOLLOW THE MONEY

I just wanted to say that *SURGE* has got to be one of the best magazines out there. You guys really came out of nowhere on a strong foot. Anyway, there are many new systems coming out, but I don't think many of them will last. The only contender I really see, besides the PSP, is the Nokia N-Gage. Sure, it has flaws, but they're greatly exaggerated.

Nokia is the biggest cell phone company in the world; they have enough money to back the N-Gage. With upcoming titles like *Alien Front*, *Joe*, *Requiem of Hell*, *Ashen*, *Marcel Desailly's Pro Soccer*, *Ghost Recon: Jungle Storm*, and many others, I truly think

"NOKIA HAS THE AMBITION AND THE POWER TO MAKE THE N-GAGE SUCCESSFUL, AND I THINK THEY WILL."



the N-Gage can carve its own niche in the market.

A new and improved model debuted this spring, which is proof that Nokia is taking this seriously. Aside from that, no other handheld has online gaming potential. Even though it's only shadow racing right now, turn-based online titles such as *Tiger Woods*, *Pathway to Glory*, and *Pocket Kingdom: Own the World* can really advance mobile gaming. Nokia has the ambition and the power to make the N-Gage successful, and I think they will.

—JoN

GOING APE

Why did you list the DISCover ApeXtreme with the N-Gage, Phantom, and Zodiac? The ApeXtreme is simply a brilliant idea. First of all, the PC gaming industry has peaked its user base. Unless something changes, there won't be a serious rise in the amount of people buying PC games or subscribing to matchmaking services and MMORPGs. It's about time somebody tried something like this. Most people don't want to deal with the malfunctions and quirks computers represent, especially if they just want to run computer games.

Secondly, there needs to be some standardized way to get PC games and possibly other programs to run properly. Not that I am saying DISC should hold a monopoly based on standardization, but it would be nice to have a common way for things to work.

Last, but not least, it is going to be fun to get the ApeXtreme to run certain programs that it wasn't meant to run. Since the ApeXtreme won't have any sort of Xbox-style security features, getting a program such as MAME to run will be as easy as programming your very own script and downloading it into the ApeXtreme's script library, which is used to run common PC games.

Please don't list the ApeXtreme with the N-Gage, Phantom, and the Zodiac. The ApeXtreme actually has a great concept going for it, unlike the previously mentioned consoles. Besides, the ApeXtreme has actually found a loyal fan base waiting for its arrival; the N-Gage and the Phantom only received ridicule.

—Fuiko Tamagawa



HOT TOPICS

WAR GAMES

Kuma Reality Games recently started *Kuma!War*, a tactical squad-based FPS for subscribers that constantly updates its mission list to reflect conflicts unfolding in the real world. Obviously, the current quagmire in Iraq is the centerpiece of many of the new missions. One could argue that creating entertainment about current events can trivialize the very nature of the event, inevitably distorting the war in the eyes of the game player. What do you believe are the ethics surrounding a game of this nature, given that many of the missions are coming out only weeks after the conflicts take place? Do you see a substantial difference between this type of game and more historical games like *Call of Duty* and *Battlefield Vietnam*?

WOMEN AND GAMING

One of the biggest obstacles for videogames on the way to mainstream acceptance is developing appealing content for the fairer sex. We men have our sports and war titles galore to fuel our testosterone, but where is the estrogen-based content? Ladies, we know you're out there—tell us what kind of games you would enjoy playing.



MOBILE MADNESS

With the impending release of the Nintendo DS, the Sony PSP, the Nokia N-Gage QD, and the expanding wireless gaming services, which is your mobile gaming solution of choice? Do any of these new platforms appeal to you, or are you more likely to stick with your trusty Game Boy Advance?

Do you have an opinion on these hot topics or on *SURGE*? Please write to letters@surgemag.com.

“I GUESS PROFESSIONAL GAMING IS BIG IN PLACES LIKE KOREA, BUT NO WAY IN HELL WILL IT GET VERY BIG HERE WHEN WE HAVE COOLER THINGS TO WATCH LIKE WRESTLING, SNOWBOARDING, AND LINGERIE FOOTBALL.”

IT'S THE PC, STUPID!

First of all, the N-Gage has already arrived and pretty much failed. I know they were working on a reworked version, but the damage has been done. I specifically am writing to comment on the ApeXtreme. I believe it is here to stay and will succeed where others fail because it has already succeeded.

Basically the ApeXtreme is already a success because it plays PC games. PC is already a proven ground for games. People buy PCs specifically to play PC games, so a console that offers PC gameplay is a no-brainer idea that should have already come to pass.

Consider the fact that PC games are a bit of a fuss with installations and maintenance. The ApeXtreme takes care of those issues. Add a DVD player, a PVR, and some other functions, and you have a fine machine for your living room or home theater.

—Joe Menza

REVIEW MADNESS WHAT'S IN A NUMBER?

I bought your mag for the first time because it stated there was a review for *Far Cry*. No offense, but it didn't seem like a review to me. It was like reading an extended version of the info the company printed on the packaging for the game. Who cares if you rated it 8 out of 10. What was the meaning of the rating? What was good? What was bad?

Let your readers know your opinions. Don't just give a write-up of what's in the game.

—DJKasz

SURGE reviewer Russ Fischer responds:
You're right—that review reads like it was written by a stooge, but that's because, for once, 95 percent of what the company proclaimed about a game was actually relevant and true. Online, it's easy to wax five poetic pages about every detail, but with a couple hundred words, sometimes that's the way it works.

There is something missing in the text, though. Yeah, the AI's good, the physics are great, and the total lack of invisible walls is blessed. But it's the feeling, which makes old tricks feel new, gives a nod to *UT*, and then proceeds to play as fresh as *Half-Life*—fresh enough even to wash away the taste of *XIII*.

DEAD ON ARRIVAL

A quick question about your *Dead or Alive Ultimate* review: Was it based on a final build of the game, or was it the preview code? The review was pretty short and didn't touch on much at all, so I was wondering if you could shed some light on how you're reviewing the game when it's not even due out until late summer.

Your review is already getting the magazine bad press from most *DOA* message boards, but I thought I'd go to the source before I go along with the crowd.

—The Doctor

Russ Fischer responds:

Sometimes when you think you're pulling a scoop on something, you rely on sources and code that you shouldn't. (The CIA knows what I'm talking about.) This was one of those times, and instead of acting smart, I submitted the text as a review rather than a preview. I beg the forgiveness of *DOA* fans, Tecmo, and most of all, my editors. I've written "I Will Only Trust Tecmo" on the board 1,000 times, and my wrist really hurts. Can I go now?

TOTAL INFORMATION AWARENESS

I just picked up a copy of your new magazine. I put it up there with other great "reading mags," like *XBN*. You guys like to give a lot of info when reviewing a game. I love that.

There is just one thing: when you review a game, let me know if there will be a future port of the game on another console. This is a key feature, because when you spend the money on a home theater and you buy a game on PS2 that will eventually come out on the Xbox, you feel somewhat cheated that you didn't get the HDTV quality and the 5.1 surround sound.

—Dan

SOUNDING OFF SWEET, SWEET SILENCE

You guys aren't the only ones who hate the soundtracks on all the games coming out these days. I'm totally obsessed with *Madden NFL 2004*, but the music is so bad that I turn off all of the songs and scroll through my menus in silence! It's not that I don't like rock or rap, but the songs they pick are terrible. The same goes for all the other sports and racing games I play. Sometimes I wish I had an Xbox so I could just import my own tunes.

—Absolut

PROFESSIONAL GAMING: FACT OR FICTION? GAMING VS. LINGERIE?

I guess professional gaming is big in places like Korea, but no way in hell will it get very big here when we have cooler things to watch like wrestling, snowboarding, and lingerie football. Plus, what makes gaming cool is that we all can do it; we don't need to watch some supernerd do it to be entertained.

—Elias

POWER.



**THE MOST POWERFUL & UPGRADABLE
SFF SYSTEM AVAILABLE TODAY...
AND IT ALWAYS WILL BE.**

**FULLY UPGRADABLE TO INDUSTRY STANDARDS,
TECHNOLOGY WILL NEVER OUTPACE YOUR
HORNET PRO SYSTEM.**

**Features: Whisper Quiet 270 Watt Power
Supply Option - More Power than ANY
other Small Form Factor PC today.**

**Tool-less construction - FULL SIZE AGP Card - 3 PCI
Slots - Removable Mainboard Tray - 2 Temp. Moni-
tors - Detachable Handle - 2x3.5" (int), 1x3.5", 1x5.
25" - 4 USB (2.0/1.1) and Audio In/Out on front -
Whisper Quiet front and side fan w/optional rear fan.
-Perfect for LAN parties & Clusters - Dimensions
WxHxD: 11" x 9" (9.5" w/feet) x 13" -
Designed to be lightweight and portable.**

NOW AVAILABLE WITH THE POWERFUL AMD ATHLON™ 64 3700+ PROCESSOR.

- Provides leading-edge 32-bit performance for music, video, and games and is ready for future 64-bit software
- Improves security against certain types of viruses, with Enhanced Virus Protection for the upcoming Microsoft® Windows® XP SP2
- Conserves power & operates quietly with AMD Cool'n'Quiet™ technology
- Features HyperTransport™ technology for improved multitasking performance
- Designed to be compatible with the upcoming Microsoft® Windows® XP 64-bit Edition software



Monarch is an
Official AMD
Launch Partner
and a Platinum
Solution Provider



The Athlon 64 is the only Windows®-compatible 64-bit PC processor.

MAXIMUM PC
FEBRUARY 2004
REVIEW VERDICT: **9**



Computer Games
★★★★★
Five of Five Stars

Hornet Pro Systems featured at Tribes® Council 2004

Vivendi Universal Games
chose the Hornet Pro to
preview the upcoming game
Tribes: Vengeance for the press
in February 2004

**TRIBES
VENGEANCE**

"The Hornet Pro absolutely kicks ass.

Though Tribes: Vengeance had never been tested on AMD's 64-bit processor, it performed like a champ! The Hornet Pros are the perfect machines to showcase Tribes: Vengeance and the technology inside is incredible. The only problem we had is that they wouldn't let us take one home!"

**- Vivendi Universal Games
Chris Mahnen,
Producer, Tribes: Vengeance**

SPECIAL LIMITED TIME OFFER

Visit www.monarchcomputer.com/hornetpro
to get **\$50 Off** any Hornet Pro Custom
System or Barebones!



Monarch Computer Systems
www.monarchcomputer.com

**Buy Online or by phone:
1-800-611-0875 or
1-8-MONARCHPC**

Paypal - Visa - Mastercard - Discover - AMEX



Commercial leasing available for purchases as low as \$1000.

Prices subject to change without notice. Monarch Computer not responsible for typographical errors.



We ship to the Continental U.S.,
Alaska, Hawaii, APOs,
Puerto Rico, and Canada



AMD, the AMD Arrow logo, AMD Athlon, and combinations thereof, are trademarks of Advanced Micro Devices, Inc. All brands and product names are trademarks or registered trademarks of their respective companies. Tribes and the Tribes logo are registered trademarks or trademarks of Sierra Entertainment, Inc. in the U.S. and/or other countries and are used with permission by Vivendi Universal Games, Inc.

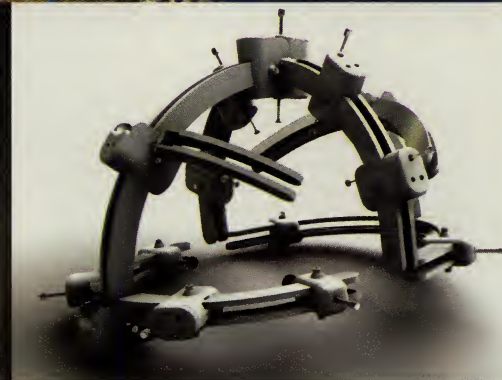
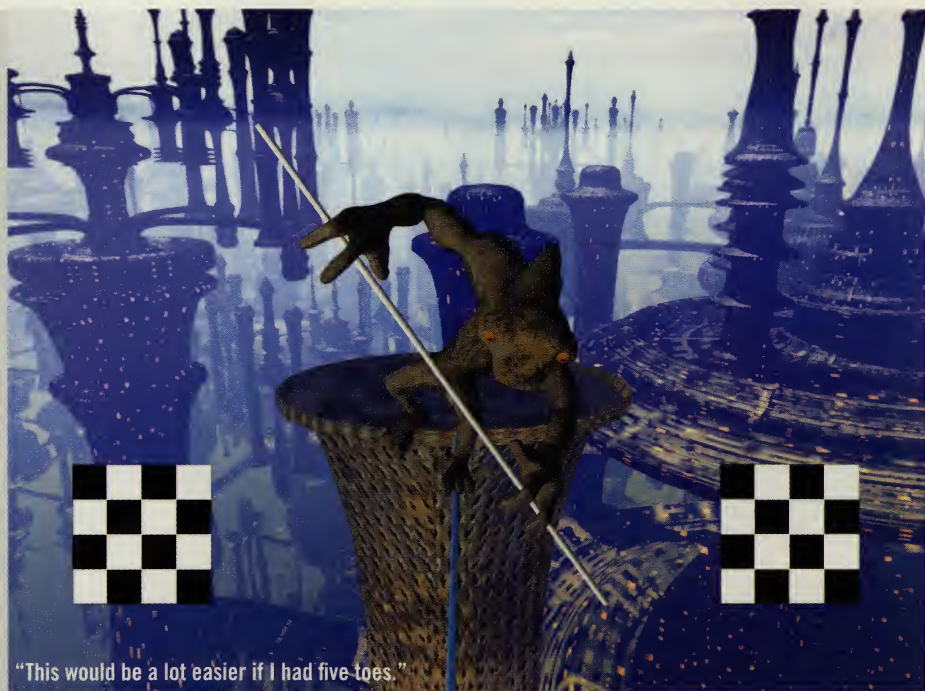
Blink, Blink, Squint—the Cheat Code of Tomorrow?

In *Mind Balance*, you guide Mawg, a sort of E.T. on steroids, as he quivers across a tightrope high above the rooftops of a futuristic city. If he falls, he dies, and you lose. It doesn't sound like the world's most compelling gameplay experience—until you consider how it's played, not with your hands or feet (à la this writer's favorite game, *Britney's Dance Beat*), but with your brain waves, man.

How does it work? Well, they take a long, pointy tube and jam it into the hole in the back of your neck that the Machines drilled when they took over the planet and started harvesting humans for their energy.

Hold up, wrong press release. It's more like a futuristic headset with nodes that monitor the electrical activity of your occipital lobe, where all your brain's visual processes take place. You put on the Cerebus headset, and after a very short training phase, game on. As the intrepid Mawgster makes his way along the tightrope, checkered boxes on either side of the screen blink at specially set frequencies. If you sense Mawg is tipping to the left, direct your sight toward the right side of the screen; if he's about to fall of the right side, go West, young man!

MindGames, the game's Ireland-based development group, sees its technology as offering a lot more than just fun and games. Although it has not yet been licensed or marketed, the technology could be a boon for people with very limited movement, but who retain the ability to see and think.



Samus: Big-Screen Darling?

One of our all-time favorite game franchises, *Metroid*, is destined to join the ranks of *TRON*, *Super Mario Bros.*, *Tomb Raider*, and *Resident Evil*—it's going to be made into a blockbuster movie.

We know, we know: Those movies sucked (with the exception of *TRON*), but this maybe, possibly, might not suck. John Woo is slated to direct.

Woo redefined the action genre with a whole mess of Hong Kong movies (*The Killer*, *Hard-Boiled*, and *A Better Tomorrow* are among the best) before taking a serious nosedive with *Broken Arrow* and everything since (see *Windtalkers* and, most recently, *Paycheck*). Despite falling off, one cannot deny that his operatic, two-gun signature style has become an instantly recognizable action movie cliché (see Mr. White, Neo, et al), and we still have hope for the guy to do wonders with our beloved bounty hunter babe, Samus.

Live Updates

Although Microsoft tends to be a bit hush hush as it relates to future Xbox Live developments, we managed to squeeze some dirt from a few of their spokespersons regarding the host of new features, unofficially called *Tsunami*, expected to be unleashed later this year.

Tackling the unenviable task of keeping its 750,000-odd subscribers happy, Xbox Live will offer what Microsoft calls a "better social experience" with new and improved ways for gamers to engage one another. For instance, new features will boost team dynamics; it will be easier than ever to send and receive messages, save statistics, and challenge other squads. Maximized online storage will mean gamers can create and share mottos, emblems, and custom content, as well as maps and rosters. MSN Messenger features and MSN alerts will be integrated, too (just what gamers needed).

All in all, we're pretty excited, as the new features will allow users and publishers to come up with new and interesting facets of online gameplay.

And the Award Goes To...

The fourth annual International Game Developers Association's Choice Awards were dominated by the good folks at BioWare, the big winners with three IGDies. The effin' sweet *Knights of the Old Republic* won the Game of the Year Award. *KOTOR* also got a nod for Game Character of the Year, HK-47, that nasty C-3PO with roid rage. The Excellence in Writing award went to David Gaider, Drew Karpyshyn, Luke Kristjanson, and Peter Thomas, the scribes behind the lightsabers.

Other winners included *Call of Duty* creators Infinity Ward for Rookie Studio of the Year and Excellence in Audio. Ubisoft took home two IGDies, both for the much-vaunted *Prince of Persia*: Excellence in Game Design and Excellence in Programming.

Game Innovation Spotlight awards were given to Sony's EyeToy, the sort-of interactive Webcam for the PS2 (check out the *SURGE* Premiere issue, soon to be a huge collector's item on eBay, for more on that little guy); *Viewtiful Joe* from Capcom, that side-scroller with panache that the kiddies and 2D faithful love to love; and *WarioWare Inc.: Mega Microgame\$*, a freaky meta-game for Game Boy Advance that Nintendo launched a few months back.

These awards aren't chosen by some sap tastemaker working for an upstart cable company or by fanboy gamers voting on the titles with the sweetest looking bits of fragged flesh; IGDie winners have nabbed the recognition of their peers, since the winners are selected by pro game developers around the world who have an eye for design and high-end playability.

The sixth annual Independent Games Festival were also a part of the festivities. Top honors went to *Oasis* (Mind Control Software), a turn-based strategy game billed as "Civilization without the tears," and *Savage: The Battle for Newerth* (S2 Games), an FPS/RTS hybrid. Each studio was awarded \$15,000 for its indie efforts, and we look forward to what they will bring us in the future with their newly swollen coffers.



Mini R/C Cars at a Mini Price!

ONLY

\$3.99

each

while supplies last



These mini 1/60th scale cars charge up in about a minute with the included transmitter and feature adjustable steering and independent front suspension. With four available frequencies, as many as four can be raced at once. Just add two AA batteries and tear up the road!



How to Order:

Call 800-480-4335 or go to x-tremageek.com

Use this Keycode when ordering: **S4G3666** and get your free 64-page X-treme Geek Catalog, packed with cool products!



THE THINKING GAMER'S MAGAZINE

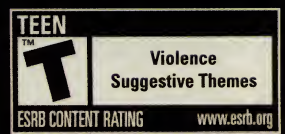


**CROSSING THEM IS
EVERY VILLAIN'S NIGHTMARE.**

WWW.CITYOFHEROES.COM



PlayNC
WWW.PLAYNC.COM





PROTECT THE STREETS



SOAR THE SKIES



JOIN OTHER HEROES

City of Heroes brings alive the world of comic books in the first massively multi-player game of its kind. A sprawling city. Hundreds of super powers. Millions of costumes. Endless villains to thwart. Non-stop action. Play as a lone vigilante or join a Super Group - the choice is yours! Everything you've ever wanted - and this is only the beginning. Play and See...at www.plaync.com.

CITY OF HEROES™

© 2004 Cryptic Studios, Inc. and NCsoft Corporation. All rights reserved. City of Heroes® a trademark of Cryptic Studios, Inc. and NCsoft Corporation. NCsoft® is a trademark of NCsoft Corporation. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners.

Living the Dream: The Waking Nightmares of a Game Tester



Working 12 to 20 hours a day. Glitches galore. Where do I sign up?

Somewhere along the line, every gamer has inevitably thought it would be a dream come true to play games for a living. Just like it would be a year-round fiesta to work in the Quality Control Department at Corona. But as with any dream occupation, there lurks a dark side. Although the trials of a professional game tester don't include addiction, DUIs, or love handles, they can prove pretty debilitating nonetheless.

What exactly do game testers do? They sit around playing games, right? Well, not exactly. "The biggest misconception about being a game tester is that we play games all day long," says Michael Graham, a Quality Assurance Project Lead with Vivendi Universal Games. "Imagine playing the same game every day for months on end. Now, imagine that none of the levels actually work, and every time you hit a security guard with the butt of your assault rifle, the game locks up to the tune of a high-pitched electronic scream. That's the life of a game tester. You look at the same unfinished software day in and day out and try to play it in such a way that is not intended and report your findings in a bug database."

Nicole Ferrara, a veteran game tester working with Eidos, agrees. "You have to have an overall love for the games," she said. "You're with the game for 20 hours a day sometimes—same games, same levels. If you get tired of games easily, it's not the job for you."

Graham and his testing crew are currently working the final kinks out of *The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay* for the Xbox, a game based on Vin Diesel's antihero from the movie *Pitch Black* and its upcoming sequel *The Chronicles of Riddick*, which hits theaters this summer. Putting the finishing touches on a game means crunch time for testers, a frantic rush to clean up all the glitches before time runs out and the game has to ship. "When we hit crunch time, we work 12-to-16-hour days almost every day of the week for at least a couple months," says Interplay's Damon Vergilio, who recently finished testing *Fallout: Brotherhood of Steel* for Xbox and

PS2. "God help you if you really hate the game you are working on."

Stop and think back to the buggiest game you've ever played. Now multiply that bugginess by 1,000. Nothing works. It crashes at the drop of a hat. The balance is horrible. Worst of all, you never move on to the next part of the game. Now imagine you have to play that game all day, every day. It's like the movie *Groundhog Day*, except you have a deadline rushing at you, and you're more or less responsible for any glitches that eek into the final cut. Does your dream-job description include months of the same broken levels of the same broken game and overdosing on caffeine and sugar to sustain yourself through each brain-frying, OT-clocking day?

Why would anyone want to do this?

For the few, the proud, and the masochistic, game testing can be that much-sought-after doorway into the gaming industry; many producers and designers started out as humble game testers. Despite the drawbacks, it can be fun and rewarding, assuming you have the right disposition for the job. "You get to see games at all stages of the development cycle," explains Graham. "You get to see games behave in totally bizarre ways, until it actually matures into something that makes sense. Having a hand in that process can be very rewarding when you see your ideas implemented. So, when consumers play your game and get a kick out of pushing a guy into a rock crusher, you can say, 'Hey, I came up with that.'"

A good tester knows when to be tenacious and when to turn off that pit-bull ferocity. The clock is constantly ticking, and as fervently as you may believe something needs to be fixed, the powers that be may disagree. It's their nickel, and when they say move on, you move on, like it or not.

"I want testers on my projects that are ambitious and [who] will have a sense of ownership with the game," says Graham. "Those kinds of people become your go-to guys. But regardless [of whether] you are interested in a career or just trying to keep busy for the summer, you need to be able to communicate. Being a good gamer does not necessarily mean you'll make a good tester. If nobody can understand what it is you are trying to say, then you're useless. So stay in school."

Spending all that time pulling your hair out can pay off, though—after all, you're essentially testing entertainment. "My parents asked me, 'What are you going to do for a living, play videogames?'" Ferrara remembers. "The answer is now Yes, but it's definitely not all fun and games."

Undaunted hardcore gamers will still want to know where they can sign up. If that sounds like you, and you think you're up for it, give it a shot by sending a resume directly to a developer or by searching through a job site like GameJobs.com. Don't say we didn't warn you. ●



Timeline of a Game Tester's Typical Day

8:55 a.m.

Power up *Brotherhood of Steel*. Cyrus. Nadia. Cain. Day #92. Stare at screen in incredulous frustration.

10:15 a.m.

Cans of Whoop Ass aren't detonating. The Radscorpions seem to be propositioning Nadia. Report to error database. Game crashes. Start over.

11:25 a.m.

Remove carpal tunnel glove for coffee run. Hum the soundtrack's "Pure Hatred" along the way. You know it by heart; it's been the only song in your head for the past ten days!

Noon–1:15 p.m.

Hot debate with designers as to whether or not Taco Bell would survive the 2077 worldwide nuclear fallout, and would Deathclaws work there.

3:30 p.m.

Conclude that the FEV-mutated Wasteland People definitely resemble Christina Aguilera. Cyrus somehow impaling himself on Plasma Saw again. Report to error database. Game crashes. Start over.

4:15 p.m.

Legs are cramping. Spiked Baseball Bat now detonating for some reason. Radscorpions now propositioning Cain. Report to error database. Game freezes. Start over.

5:55–6:02 p.m.

Cyrus. Nadia. Cain. Rub eyes. Coffee. Cyrus. Nadia. Cain. Hum "Pure Hatred." Rub eyes.

8:55 p.m.

Conclude that Cain definitely resembles Christina Aguilera. Game crashes. Go home.

The Mod Squad

How the *Battlefield 1942* mod *Desert Combat* put Trauma Studios on the map.

For more than a year, Frank DeLise harbored a deep secret. Each night, after settling into bed with his wife at 9 p.m., DeLise would quietly rise an hour later and, unbeknownst to his spouse, cuddle up with his computer. For the next six hours he'd tap away on his keyboard, diligently working on what would become *Desert Combat*, a free, online add-on (or mod) to the military action game *Battlefield 1942*. "All my wife cared about was that we fell asleep together," remembers DeLise. His mornings must have been rough; he'd follow up his nightly marathon of modding with a full-time day job as a 3-D animator.

Today, his wife is in on the secret, as is the gaming community, which has turned *Desert Combat* into a blockbuster success. To date, more than 4 million

players have downloaded the game, which updates the World War II-themed *Battlefield* into an online Operation: Desert Storm simulator with Blackhawk helicopters and A-10 Thunderbolt IIs. In the wake of the game's runaway success, DeLise dropped the day job. He and his team of 15 collaborators have since fast-tracked their way into professional modding, transforming their volunteer efforts into the white-hot game developer known as Trauma Studios. "I've said it before, and I'll say it again," explains DeLise, who previously worked on special effects for movies like *Lost in Space* and *X-Men*. "The best way to get your foot in the door is to make a mod."

Back in 2002, the idea for *Desert Combat* sprouted from DeLise's frustration over the lack of modern-day military games. "There wasn't a fast-paced game with land, air, and sea vehicles," he recalls. DeLise started to devise such a game, using the Starsiege Tribes engine as a base. But then, *Battlefield 1942* came out in mid-2002. After a few plays, DeLise realized *Battlefield* would be a far more suitable foundation for his game idea. The only problem: No mod tools existed for *Battlefield*, making it nearly impossible to modify or add features to the game. DeLise was undeterred. With the help of Rex Hill, now a Trauma employee, he began to reverse engineer the *Battlefield* engine and soon found a way to hack a HUMVEE into the game. "When I posted the first image of the HUMVEE on the Internet, everyone called it a fake," he says. "They couldn't believe it was real."

A few fellow modders realized DeLise wasn't faking it, and an international band of *Battlefield* brothers soon formed to build a modern-day military game. Among the volunteers: 16-year-olds, fans from France and Germany, and even a US Air Force pilot. No one got paid in anything but plaudits from online fans, but that was enough. Before long, *Desert Combat* began to take shape, recreating Desert Storm, with the Coalition forces fighting against Iraqi rebels in online battles. The game played like *Battlefield 1942* with 80 modern-day vehicles and new missions like protecting an oil field. By the autumn of 2002, an early version of the game was ready for testing. Released over the Internet for free, the beta version of *Desert Combat* became an instant hit.

The timing of the release couldn't have been better. With rumors swirling of an imminent US invasion of Iraq, players yearned to take out their aggression on a modern-day military game. By the time the war officially started in March 2003, *Desert Combat* had broken all records. Today, more online gamers play the *Battlefield* mod than play *Battlefield* itself. As such, it's not surprising that Electronic Arts, the publisher of *Battlefield*, and DICE, the Swedish-based game developer, caught on to the *Desert Combat* phenomenon. Rather than try to shut down the mod, the game creators embraced it wholeheartedly. "EA

Frank DeLise (left) and Joe Halper are loving their rise from part-time modders to full-time developers.





Even after the release of *Battlefield Vietnam*, thousands of gamers are eschewing jungle combat for modern warfare in *Desert Combat*. The great mod earned Trauma Studios a \$500,000 development deal with *Battlefield* creators DICE.



called us up and said, 'Thanks for extending the shelf life of our product,'" remembers DeLise. Later, EA recruited DeLise and his team to create and release mod tools for *Battlefield*. To date, these tools have spawned a number of new mod projects, such as *Battlefield: Pirates* and an unlikely racing game called *Battlefield: Interstate 82*.

With *Desert Combat*, the Trauma team proved its worth, and EA and DICE have duly signed these masterminds to a long-term development deal. The arrangement has allowed most members of the

Trauma team to quit their day jobs and turn their former volunteer work into a new career path. In fact, Trauma's New York studio already staffs ten full-time employees. "It's definitely a dream come true," says DeLise, hinting that Trauma won't make free add-on packs forever. "I'd love for us to do our own full-scale game one day." The Trauma team clearly has the gumption to turn ambition into results. Until it branches out into full-on game design, DeLise is happy that he finally gets a full eight hours of sleep every night. ☺

the suffering





The Art of Suffering

How Surreal Software took videogame horror to the next level with *The Suffering*. by Andy Eddy

Have you ever made assumptions about how a game would play based on the box it comes in, only to find out after actually playing it that it was something quite different?

Though the packaging that accompanies Midway's *The Suffering* promises a wicked ride, players could never guess the surprises this title packs. An early 2004 surprise that was met with good reviews, *The Suffering* centers on the horrors—both figuratively and literally—of institutional violence. On death row at Abbott State Penitentiary, the inmates are talking about their newest neighbor, a rough-looking man named Torque, when an earth-shattering cataclysm hits the prison and all hell breaks loose. With the demons of the prison's past resurrected and preying upon both guards and inmates, Torque must fight his way out of Abbott while sorting out his own inner demons. As you play through the game, the line between the real and surreal

continually blurs, and no one knows for sure what's actually going on.

SURGE's behind-the-scenes look at the making of *The Suffering* reveals a similar scenario. The development process took various unexpected turns along the way, and the end result is a product far better than what Surreal Software originally planned. Like those who have played *The Suffering*, the game makers had to go the distance before they knew what they had on their hands.

Depth Perceptions

The Suffering would have been a perfectly entertaining and challenging game if the makers had set it up for the player like this: You're a badass prisoner named Torque. The left stick moves you, and this button fires your weapon, clearing



\$ 899

GAMER ULTRA 2000 ELITE

- NVIDIA® Athlon™ 64 MB w/ 8X AGP
- 512MB PC3200 DDR400 Memory
- 120GB 7200RPM 8MB Cache Serial ATA150 HD
- NVIDIA® GeForce™ FX 5500 256MB 8X AGP Video
- 16X DVD-ROM
- 52X32X52 CD-RW Drive
- nForce 3 5.1 3-D Surround Sound
- 600Watt Subwoofer System
- 56K V.92 Modem & 1.44MB Floppy Drive
- Multimedia Control Internet Keyboard & Mouse
- Turbo X-Infinity Case 420Watt with See Through Windows and Sound Activated Neon Light.
- 6 Cool Custom Colors to Choose From
- Microsoft® Windows® XP Home Edition
- Microsoft® Work 7.0
- Free First Year On Site Service plus 24/7 Tech Support
- Upgrade to Siculo RW360XL 2.1 Gaming Speakers System for \$75

AMD Athlon™ 64 FX-53 Processor	\$ 1545 CAH601
AMD Athlon™ 64 3400+ Processor	\$ 1059 CAH602
AMD Athlon™ 64 3200+ Processor	\$ 915 CAH603
AMD Athlon™ 64 3000+ Processor	\$ 899 CAH604



\$ 1055

GAMER ULTRA 8000 DREAM

- NVIDIA® nForce™3 Athlon™ 64 MB w/ 8X AGP
- 512MB PC3200 DDR400 Memory
- 120GB 7200RPM 8MB Cache Serial ATA150 HD
- NVIDIA® GeForce™ FX 5700 8X AGP 256MB DDR w/ TV Out
- NEC 8X DVD+-RW Drive
- 16X DVD-ROM
- nForce 3 5.1 3-D Surround Sound
- Creative Cambridge Desk Top Theater 5.1 S560 5.1 Surround Sound System
- 56K V.92 Modem & 1.44MB Floppy Drive
- Ideazon CrossFire Gaming Swapable Z-Board & Mouse
- Aluminum X-Super Alien Server Tower Case 425W w/ MOD "See Through Windows" & Neon Light
- 6 Cool Custom Colors to Choose From
- Microsoft® Windows® XP Home Edition
- Microsoft® Work 7.0
- Free First Year On Site Service plus 24/7 Tech Support

AMD Athlon™ 64 FX-53 Processor	\$ 1749 CAG601
AMD Athlon™ 64 3400+ Processor	\$ 1265 CAG602
AMD Athlon™ 64 3200+ Processor	\$ 1119 CAG603
AMD Athlon™ 64 3000+ Processor	\$ 1055 CAG604



\$ 1655

GAMER ULTRA 9800 XT

- NVIDIA® nForce™3 Athlon™ 64 MB w/ 8X AGP
- 1024MB PC3200 DDR400 Memory
- 200GB 7200RPM 8MB Cache Serial ATA150 HD
- ATI® RADEON™ 9800-XT 256MB DDR Video Card w/ TV Out & DVI
- Free Half Life 2 Full Version Game
- NEC 8X DVD+-RW Drive 2500A
- Combo Drive (16X DVD-Rom & 52X32X52 CD-RW)
- Creative Lab 5B Audigy 2 ES 7.1 Sound w/ IEEE
- Creative Cambridge Inspire T7700 7.1 Surround Sound System
- 56K V.92 Modem & 1.44MB Floppy Drive
- Ideazon CrossFire Gaming Swapable Z-Board
- Microsoft® Optical Intelli Explorer Mouse
- Aluminum X-Super Alien Server Tower Case 425W w/ MOD "See Through Windows" & Neon Light
- 6 Cool Custom Colors to Choose From
- Microsoft® Windows® XP Home Edition
- Microsoft® Work 7.0
- Free First Year On Site Service plus 24/7 Tech Support

AMD Athlon™ 64 FX-53 Processor	\$ 2349 CAF601
AMD Athlon™ 64 3400+ Processor	\$ 1865 CAF602
AMD Athlon™ 64 3200+ Processor	\$ 1719 CAF603
AMD Athlon™ 64 3000+ Processor	\$ 1655 CAF604

AMD®, the AMD® Arrow logo, AMD® Athlon™, and combinations thereof are trademarks of Advanced Micro Devices, Inc.

- The first 64-bit PC processor in a class by itself designed specifically for cinematic computing
- Full throttle technology for immersive gaming and amazing digital media
- AMD Athlon 64 Processor with HyperTransport Technology
- Up to 1600MHz System Bus



The ONLY Windows-compatible 64-bit PC processor



Picture Shows w/ Optional Siculo RW-670XL 5.1 Gaming Speaker System

CYBERPOWERINC.COM

ORDER TOLL FREE [800] 707-0393



\$ 1009

GAMER ULTRA 9000 PRO

- NVIDIA® Athlon™ 64 MB w/ 8X AGP
- 1024MB PC3200 DDR400 Memory
- 120GB 7200RPM 8MB Cache Serial ATA150 HD
- NVIDIA® GeForce™ FX 5900 128MB DDR 8X AGP Video Card w/ TV Out & DVI
- 16X DVD-ROM
- 52X32X52 CD-RW Drive
- nForce™3 3D 5.1 Surround Sound
- Creative Cambridge Desk Top Theater 5.1 SBS 560 5.1 Surround Sound System
- 56K Modem & 1.44MB Floppy Drive
- Ideazon CrossFire Gaming Swapable Z-Board
- Microsoft® Optical Intelli Explorer Mouse
- Aluminum A-Top Z- Alien Server Tower Case 450W w/ MOD "See Through Windows" & Neon Light
- 6 Cool Custom Colors to Choose From
- Microsoft® Windows® XP Home Edition
- Microsoft® Work 7.0
- Free First Year On Site Service plus 24/7 Tech Support

AMD Athlon™ 64 FX-53 Processor	\$ 1799	CAI601
AMD Athlon™ 64 3400+ Processor	\$ 1319	CAI602
AMD Athlon™ 64 3200+ Processor	\$ 1175	CAI603
AMD Athlon™ 64 3000+ Processor	\$ 1009	CAI604



\$ 1289

GAMER XTREME 9800 XT

- NVIDIA nForce-2 400 Ultra MB with 8X AGP
- 1GB PC3200 Dual Channel DDR400 Memory
- 120GB 7200RPM Hard Drive
- New!!! ATI® RADEON™ 9800-XT 256MB DDR Video Card w/ TV Out & DVI
- Free Half Life 2 Full Version Game
- NEC 8X DVD+RW Drive 2500A
- Combo Drive (16X DVD-Rom & 52X32X52 CD-RW)
- nForce 2 5.1 3-D Surround Sound
- Creative Cambridge Desk Top Theater 5.1 SBS 560 5.1 Surround Sound System
- 56K V.92 Modem & 1.44MB Floppy Drive
- Ideazon CrossFire Gaming Swapable Z-Board
- Microsoft® Optical Intelli Explorer Mouse
- Aluminum X-Super Alien Server Tower Case 425W w/ MOD "See Through Windows" & Neon Light
- 6 Cool Custom Colors to Choose From
- Microsoft® Windows® XP Home Edition
- Microsoft® Work 7.0
- Free First Year On Site Service plus 24/7 Tech Support

AMD Athlon™ XP Processor 3200+	\$ 1359	CD601
AMD Athlon™ XP Processor 3000+	\$ 1315	CD602
AMD Athlon™ XP Processor 2800+	\$ 1289	CD603



\$ 729

GAMER XTREME 8000 DREAM

- NVIDIA nForce-2 400 Ultra MB with 8X AGP
- 512MB PC3200 Dual Channel DDR400 Memory
- 120GB 7200RPM Hard Drive
- NVIDIA® GeForce™ FX 5500 256MB 8X AGP w/ TV Out & DVI
- NU 8X DVD+RW Drive
- nForce 2 5.1 3-D Surround Sound
- Creative Cambridge Desk Top Theater 5.1 SBS 560 5.1 Surround Sound System
- 56K V.92 Modem & 1.44MB Floppy Drive
- Multimedia Control Internet Keyboard & Mouse
- Microsoft® Optical IntelliMouse
- A-Top X-Blade Case 420Watt with See Through Windows and Sound Activated Neon Light.
- 6 Cool Custom Colors to Choose From
- Microsoft® Windows® XP Home Edition
- Microsoft® Work 7.0
- Free First Year On Site Service plus 24/7 Tech Support

AMD Athlon™ XP Processor 3200+	\$ 839	CBE601
AMD Athlon™ XP Processor 3000+	\$ 799	CBE602
AMD Athlon™ XP Processor 2800+	\$ 769	CBE603
AMD Athlon™ XP Processor 2700+	\$ 755	CBE604
AMD Athlon™ XP Processor 2600+	\$ 739	CBE605
AMD Athlon™ XP Processor 2500+	\$ 729	CBE606



\$ 625

GAMER XTREME 7000 ELITE

- NVIDIA nForce-2 400 Ultra MB with 8X AGP
- 512MB PC3200 DDR400 Memory
- 120GB 7200RPM Ultra ATA100 Hard Drive
- ATI® RADEON™ 9600 128MB DDR Video Card w/ TV Out
- 16X DVD-ROM & 52X32X52 CD-RW Drive
- nForce 2 5.1 3-D Surround Sound
- 600Watt Subwoofer Speaker System
- 56K V.92 Modem & 1.44MB Floppy Drive
- Multimedia Control Internet Keyboard & Mouse
- Turbo X-Infinity Case 420 Watt with See Through Windows and Sound Activated Neon Light
- 6 Cool Custom Colors to Choose From
- Microsoft® Windows® XP Home Edition
- Microsoft® Work 7.0
- Free First Year On Site Service plus 24/7 Tech Support

AMD Athlon™ XP Processor 3200+	\$ 735	CBF601
AMD Athlon™ XP Processor 3000+	\$ 689	CBF602
AMD Athlon™ XP Processor 2800+	\$ 665	CBF503
AMD Athlon™ XP Processor 2700+	\$ 649	CBF604
AMD Athlon™ XP Processor 2600+	\$ 635	CBF605
AMD Athlon™ XP Processor 2500+	\$ 625	CBF606



\$ 559

GAMER XTREME 8000 LIGHTNING

- NVIDIA nForce-2 400 Ultra MB with 8X AGP
- 512MB PC3200 Dual Channel DDR400 Memory
- 80GB 7200RPM Ultra ATA133 Hard Drive
- ATI® RADEON™ 9200 128MB DDR Video Card w/ TV Out
- 16X DVD-ROM & 52X32X52 CD-RW Drive
- nForce 2 5.1 3-D Surround Sound
- 600Watt Stereo Subwoofer Speaker System w/ Matching Neon Light
- 56K Modem & 1.44MB Floppy Drive
- Multimedia Control Internet Keyboard & Mouse
- Turbo X-Infinity Case 420 Watt with See Through Windows and Sound Activated Neon Light
- 6 Cool Custom Colors to Choose From
- Microsoft® Windows® XP Home Edition
- Microsoft® Work 7.0
- Free First Year On Site Service plus 24/7 Tech Support

AMD Athlon™ XP Processor 3200+	\$ 689	CBL501
AMD Athlon™ XP Processor 3000+	\$ 649	CBL502
AMD Athlon™ XP Processor 2800+	\$ 609	CBL503
AMD Athlon™ XP Processor 2700+	\$ 595	CBL504
AMD Athlon™ XP Processor 2600+	\$ 579	CBL505
AMD Athlon™ XP Processor 2500+	\$ 559	CBL506



ARTEC

**Gamer's #1 Choice
for Optical Solution!!**

Artec® Presents to
all the Gamers -
Transparency "DIABLO I"
DVD-ROM & CD-RW Drives

AMD
Athlon™ XP

CyberPower Inc.

4802 Little John St. Baldwin Park, CA 91706
Tel: (626)813-7730 • Fax: (626)813-3810
Technical Support (877)876-4965
Hour: Mon-Fri 8:30A.M. ~ 6:00P.M.
Sat 9:30A.M. ~ 3:00P.M.

When Torque's insanity peaks, he can change into his alter ego, a demonic monster (below and far right) that dishes out serious punishment with his claws and blade. We wouldn't want to be his cell mate.



away any threat that stands in your path. Okay, GO!

The development actually began in that simplistic direction. But then, publisher Midway Games and Surreal Software realized they had a rare opportunity to create a deep story that reaches beyond your standard horror fare. So they went deeper, pitting morality against psychosis, delusions, and insanity.

Torque's prison break is a tough task, but the fact that the penitentiary is on an island a dozen miles off the coast of Maryland makes it all the more daunting. The rest of the island is no Six Flags; roaming its premises, players encounter a former American WWII camp, a wrecked slave ship, and a sanitarium once run by the sadistic Dr. Killjoy. This rich environment provides the perfect backdrop, endowing *The Suffering* with a host of macabre experiences. It's *The Shining* meets *The Birdman of Alcatraz*.

Then there's the tortured, surreal environment in Torque's own head. A repeat offender sent to death row for the brutal murder of his wife and two kids, Torque is hardly an angel. But the circumstances surrounding his conviction are rooted in conjecture, and Torque's defense was that he blacked out during the killings and has no recollection of whether or not he was responsible. Players soon realize that Torque's confinement at Abbott may be the least of his problems, and that his inner demons may in fact be more

powerful than the ones he's fighting on Carnate Island. Are the physical and mental beasts working together to put Torque down—or are they all just the delusions of a disturbed criminal?

Early Visions

Project development for *The Suffering* started in the latter part of 2001. According to Alan Patmore, Surreal's CEO and the game's project director, the eight-year-old developer was completing its PlayStation 2-based *Drakan: The Ancient's Gates*, the sequel to the 1999 PC action/fantasy game. Midway approached Surreal with hopes that the companies could team up on a fresh title.

"[Midway] literally said, 'We want a third-person horror game...a combination of *Silent Hill* and *Devil May Cry*,'" Patmore recalls. "We had a bunch of brainstorming meetings, and then we came up with a pitch document, which is kind of a high-level, executive summary of what we wanted to do with the game, two to three pages that incorporated that it'll take place in a prison, you're an inmate that is convicted of murdering your kids, all hell breaks loose, and then there are three endings based on how you play. That became sort of the overall vision of the game."

From there, Midway took a laissez-faire approach, especially early on in the project's timeline, letting Surreal handle the development alone and chiming in later to add polish to Surreal's game.

"They let us go for a while," said Richard Rouse III, who served as *The Suffering's* lead designer, project leader, and story writer. "We were able to build the prison and get a lot of it working without a lot of Midway involvement initially."

In June 2003, Surreal submitted the first alpha version of the game with full playthrough to Midway, showing how the game would play from start to finish. With the late-2003 target release date approaching, the remaining months would be devoted to play testing, bug fixing, and polishing—if Midway deemed the alpha adequate.

However, around that time, Midway turned the wheel on its whole publishing operation and took a drastically different track. The struggling company made a conscious decision to streamline its operations to improve business, killing some



projects to focus on others that it felt could be "triple-A" games. The executives believed *The Suffering* was one of those titles, and they granted extra development time to the project. Midway and Surreal got cracking, beefing up the game and giving it a much better polish.

"There were a lot of things that got added that at this point I can't even imagine the game without," Rouse says. "Throughout the game, Torque's wife and family show up to him in these various visions, and none of that was originally budgeted or planned, mainly because we didn't have time to build them and get them in the game."

The Mainliners (below) are the demonic remnants of the prisoners in Abbott State Penitentiary who were executed by lethal injection.



Midway liked the idea of adding those features to the game. With the clock ticking, the Surreal designers explained that the game couldn't ship at the scheduled date if they went forward with all the extras. "So they said, 'How about more time?'" Rouse recalls.

"A lot of AI work was done, too, to take the creatures up to another level. They were functional, but they weren't all that intelligent," he says. "Now, when people play the Slayer creatures, for example, they comment, 'Wow, these guys seem really smart.' That was something that was purely a function of having more time to work on it. It wasn't that it was beyond our capabilities. It's just that, well, these things take time."

Moral of the Story

The Suffering offers multiple endings based on player decisions at various crossroads in the game. Torque's subconscious urges to either do the right thing or go postal on his potential allies weren't built into the game until Surreal secured its extension.



"One of the biggest things that evolved over the course of the project was the moral choices," Patmore notes. "It was something we kind of subtly got into and planned early on in development, and it was based off a lot of player feedback. People really seemed to key into moral choice. What we really wanted to do—and what time gave us—was the ability to make it much more apparent."

"For example, in the first level, you encounter a guard. Originally, you could just shoot and kill him, and that'd go against your moral choices, but there was no real perceptible feedback. Now, when you encounter him, you hear your wife saying, 'Help him out. He's good,' [and] you hear this dark voice in your head saying, 'Kill him. He's going to betray you.' If you do kill him, you get this flash of evil. If you save him, you see your wife saying, 'I knew that there was good in you.' That was something we were touching on, but we really fleshed [it] out more based on the time, and it had a real tangible impact on the gameplay."

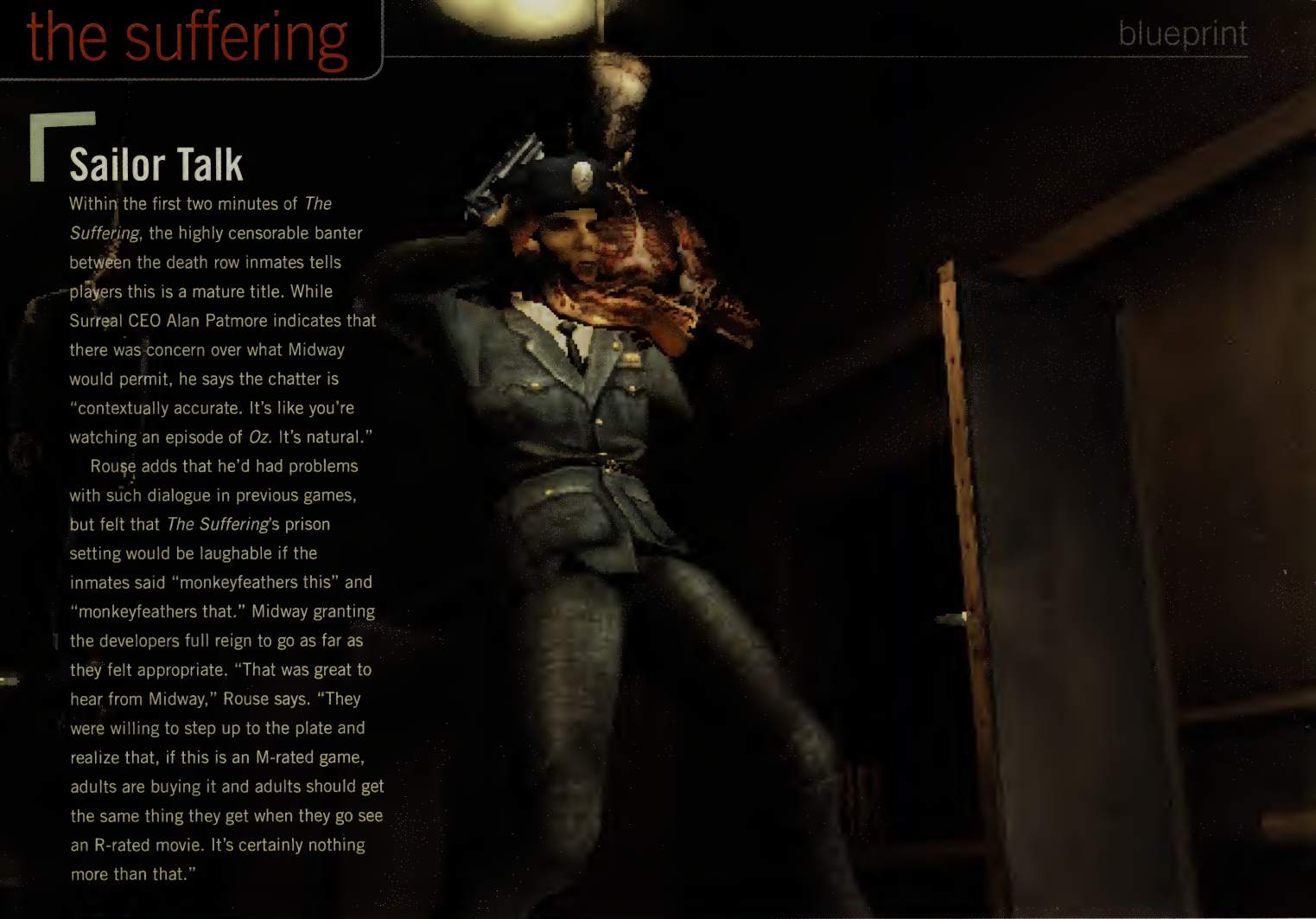
Rouse adds that in its early form, the moral-choice feature and the subsequent player rewards were more nebulous. "It was more of a 'gotcha' at the end of the game, like, 'Oh, you went through and killed all those guys. Well, here's your ending. Ha ha ha.' In the final product, there's impact on the gameplay based on how you play, which was something that I wanted to add earlier, but was like, 'Oh, man, there's no time for this.' You're able to go into rage mode longer if you are playing on the evil path, whereas if you're playing on the good path, your health goes down a little slower. It's a lot of little subtleties like that that we had time to put in and tweak."

The rage mode gives the player some freedom to make choices at various points in the game. After filling the insanity meter, which increases based on how many enemies are dispatched, players can convert Torque, for a short time, into an intensely powerful beast. Switching into the alter ego creates an interesting shift in the gameplay from projectile-based battling to more close-up melee combat. This alter ego can wreak more havoc, but players risk harming Torque by staying in that form for too long.

The designers had a tough time setting



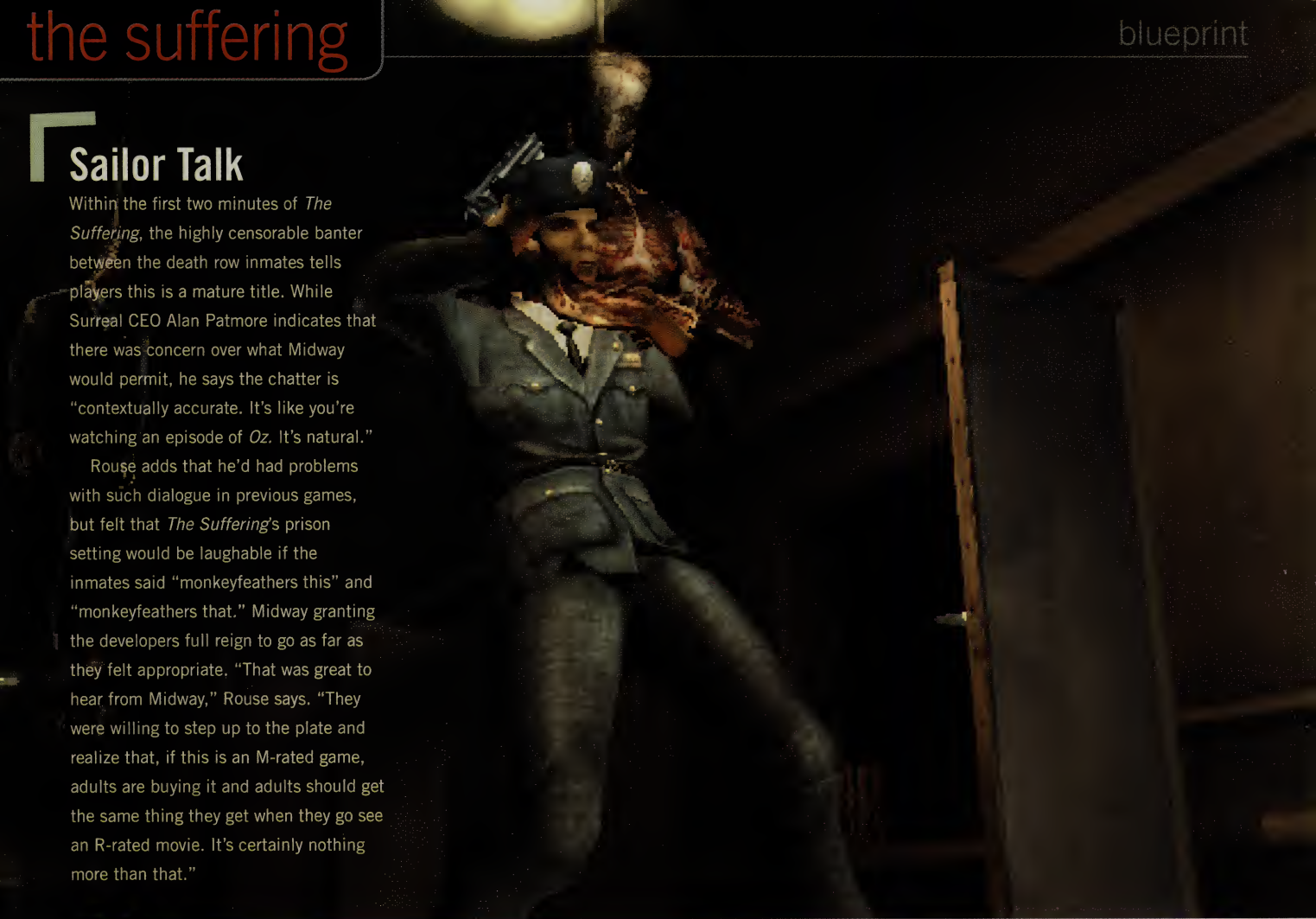
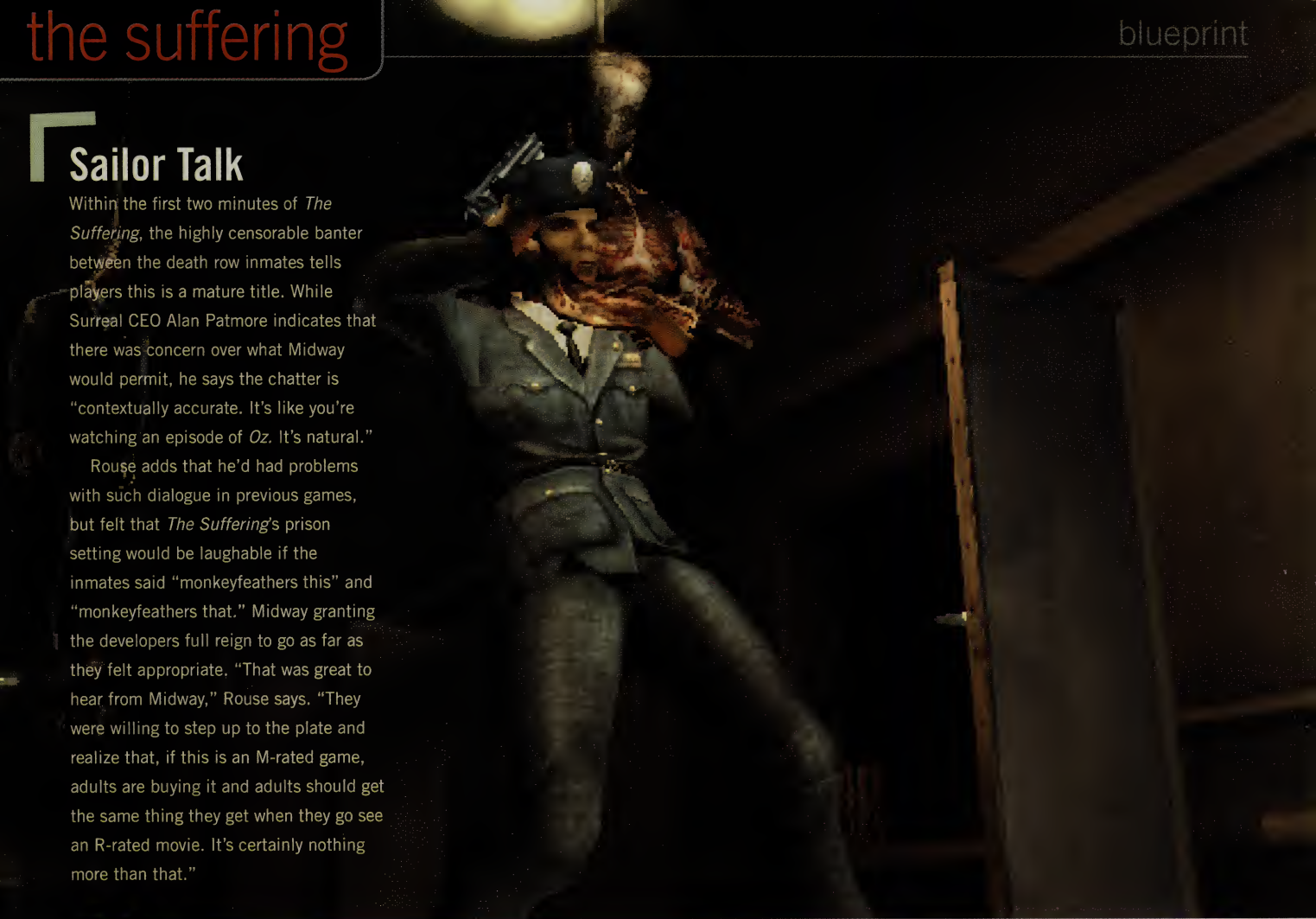
Whether he's administering lethal injections or merely expounding upon the glory of his life's work, the insane Doctor Killjoy keeps things lively.



Sailor Talk

Within the first two minutes of *The Suffering*, the highly censorable banter between the death row inmates tells players this is a mature title. While Surreal CEO Alan Patmore indicates that there was concern over what Midway would permit, he says the chatter is "contextually accurate. It's like you're watching an episode of *Oz*. It's natural."

Rouse adds that he'd had problems with such dialogue in previous games, but felt that *The Suffering's* prison setting would be laughable if the inmates said "monkeyfeathers this" and "monkeyfeathers that." Midway granting the developers full reign to go as far as they felt appropriate. "That was great to hear from Midway," Rouse says. "They were willing to step up to the plate and realize that, if this is an M-rated game, adults are buying it and adults should get the same thing they get when they go see an R-rated movie. It's certainly nothing more than that."



"I THINK AS WE TRY TO BECOME MORE OF A MASS MARKET, WE'VE GOT TO COMPETE IN TERMS OF COMPLEXITY OF CHARACTER AND DEPTH AND [OTHER] THINGS THAT FILMS AND NOVELS HAVE."

RICHARD ROUSE III,
LEAD DESIGNER, PROJECT LEADER,
AND STORY WRITER



If you were buried alive on Carnate Island, chances are you ended up a borrower (above). The reincarnated slave traders from the island's grave of shipwrecks turned into the Fester (below), another of the island's lovely inhabitants.

up scenarios where the player could be good, yet turn into this horrendous beast.

"From the very beginning, there was the conception that there's something wrong with the player character, because, for one, he can't remember whether he's guilty of these crimes," Rouse says. "Add to that the fact that you're seeing all these horrific apparitions and really disturbing things. It makes sense that your insanity would be somehow tied to that, and then you'd be able to use this to do something in the game."

"I always viewed it as a symbolic and visual manifestation of your insanity," Patmore adds. "If you play the good side, you're taking control of this anger for good in killing these creatures. You can justify it however you want in your head."

Moving Images

For a number of years, game companies have marketed their titles as "playable movies," but it's uncommon for a game to achieve both decent gameplay and movie-like depth. Given the game's setting and the mood that's generated throughout, *The Suffering* excels in both depth and play. When Patmore and Rouse discuss the title's parallels to—and the inspiration it derives from—the silver screen, it makes total sense.

"The base experience is there for the people who just want to play the game and have fun and not really think about it too much," Rouse says. "We have





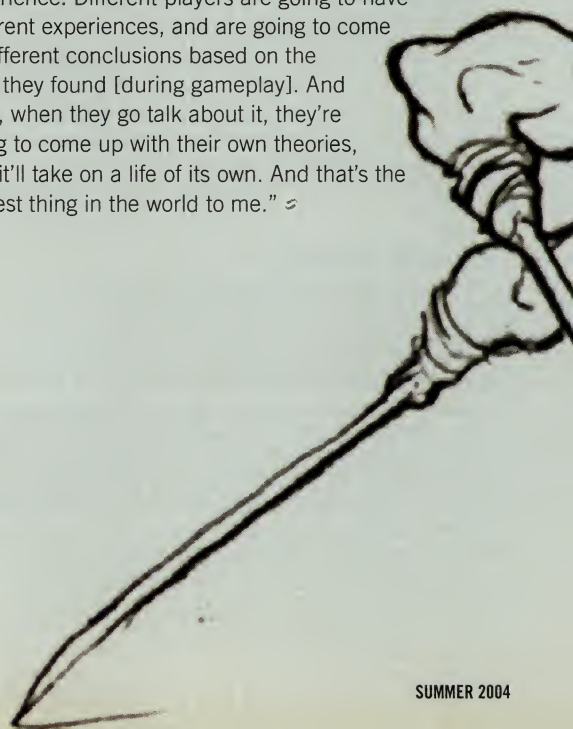
Our friend Horace here was electrocuted for slicing up his wife during a conjugal visit. He spends his afterlife haunting the prison.

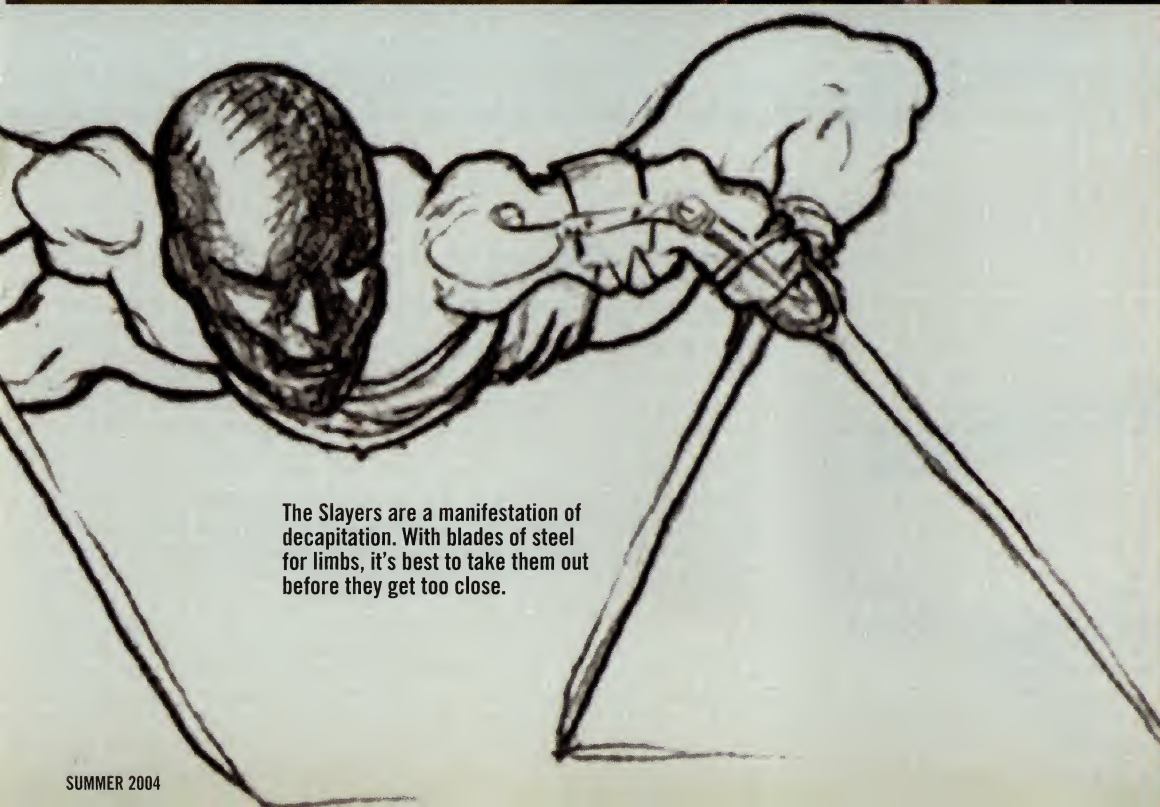
to think about it, too, that it is an M-rated game, and I do expect that a lot of 24 year olds will be playing this. When they go to the movies, and they see *Jeepers Creepers*, for example, they kind of know that this is just a titillating experience. It satisfies a certain something, but it doesn't go that much deeper. But then, if you go see *The Ring*, it has a much bigger story and much more implications about society and watching video tapes. It has many more layers of depth to it. They recognize that, and it will appeal to a broader audience as a result." *The Suffering* uses the horrific prison environment to tell a great tale, but buried within the subtext is a veiled exploration of institutional violence and its effect on both the prisoners and the practitioners. The result is a much more rewarding story than the survival horror classics *Resident Evil* or *Silent Hill*.

"A lot of people think, 'Well, they're just games, and you really need to lay the story out on a platter for everybody,'" Rouse says. "I think as we try to become more of a mass market, we've got to compete in terms of complexity of character and depth and [other] things that films and novels have."

With the game's developers taking such an ambitious approach, it's no surprise that Hollywood wants to turn *The Suffering* into a movie. While there's nothing definite at this point, the game seems like a lock to end up in theaters—and hopefully the film will do justice to the game. The limitation of film (i.e., trying to cram all *The Suffering's* suffering into a two-hour story without losing the spirit of the gameplay) will prove a challenging task for any director.

Whenever Torque does make that leap from cartridge to film, the first cool detail to get the axe will be the player's active involvement in plot development. "That's something that's big for me," Rouse explains, "having the players make their own experience. Different players are going to have different experiences, and are going to come to different conclusions based on the data they found [during gameplay]. And then, when they go talk about it, they're going to come up with their own theories, and it'll take on a life of its own. And that's the coolest thing in the world to me." ☺





The Slayers are a manifestation of decapitation. With blades of steel for limbs, it's best to take them out before they get too close.

I'll Be Back?

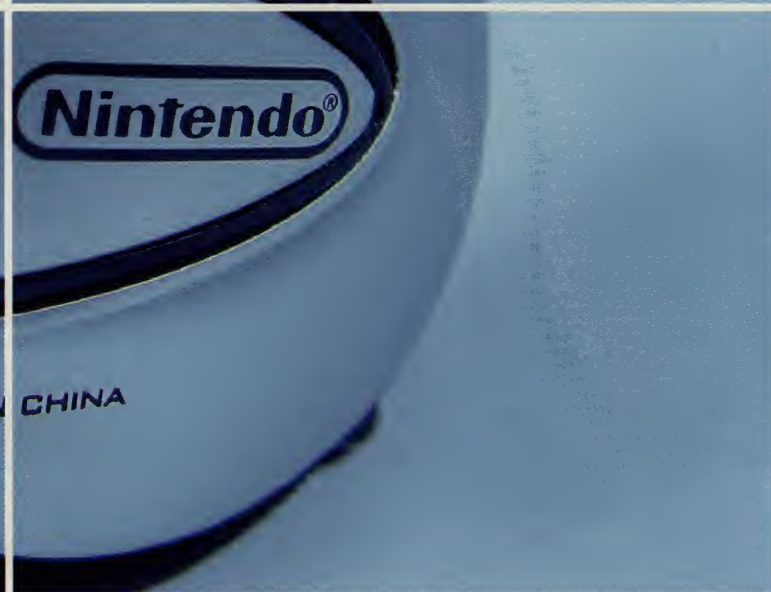
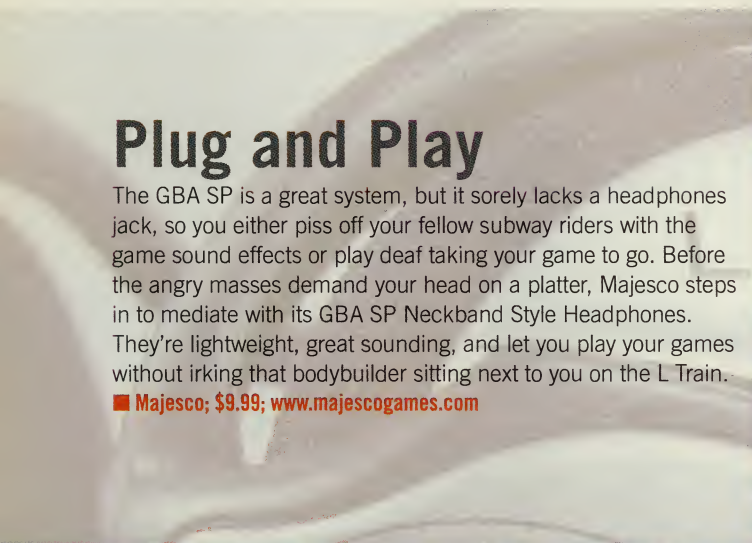
Will there be a sequel?

Everyone we spoke to, e-mailed, and attempted to bribe was understandably coy, but the guys at Surreal say they learned a lot from their work on the two *Drakan* games. Explains Richard Rouse III, the lead designer, "It was known there was going to be a *Drakan II* many months before *Drakan I* shipped. As a result, the ending was nebulous on purpose, and that actually kind of came back to bite us in the ass, because people were not satisfied with a nebulous ending." So when Surreal began planning *The Suffering*, it took pains to make everything more concrete. "Sequel or not, [we decided] this game is going to be its own contained thing. And if there's no sequel, it's fine. No one is going to expect there's going to be a sequel." So, the answer is a definite "could be." The fact that Midway recently acquired Surreal Software after *The Suffering's* initial strong sales certainly points in that direction.

Plug and Play

The GBA SP is a great system, but it sorely lacks a headphones jack, so you either piss off your fellow subway riders with the game sound effects or play deaf taking your game to go. Before the angry masses demand your head on a platter, Majesco steps in to mediate with its GBA SP Neckband Style Headphones. They're lightweight, great sounding, and let you play your games without irking that bodybuilder sitting next to you on the L Train.

■ Majesco; \$9.99; www.majescogames.com



Hard Times

Forget sorting through your stack of unnamed memory cards to find that lost franchise of *Madden*; Sony's hard drive is here to save you. This 40GB wunderkind features the massively popular MMORPG *Final Fantasy XI* to get the party started. If you're not into Moogles, it may still be worth the price to be able to download new missions from *SOCOM II* and *Syphon Filter: The Omega Strain*. Expect even more titles to take advantage of the hard drive in the coming months. No word yet on whether Sony will be selling the hard drive without the game, but keep your ears open.

■ Sony; \$99; www.playstation.com

Old-School Style

Signaling what may be seen as the peak of retro chic for Nintendo, we introduce the new classic Game Boy Advance SP. While Nintendo has been slowly releasing 8-bit classics on the GBA, they knew you'd appreciate the nostalgia of days gone by with a retrofitting handheld, as you build your own track in *Excitebike* or whack monsters in *Ice Climber*. Kick it old school with classic games like *Donkey Kong*, *Pac-Man*, *Zelda*, and *Super Mario Bros.* on the pocket-sized player that looks like a vintage NES controller. At \$99, it's worth the flashback—just don't throw it at your little sister this time.

■ Nintendo; \$99; www.nintendo.com



Nice Body

Screw staring at that three-foot tall beige box every time you boot up; it's time to inject your PC with some style. Hoojum offers amazing case designs you'd be more likely to run across at an art gallery than on a store shelf. The Cubit P4, le crème de la crème, comes correct with up to a 300GB hard drive, Hyper-Threading support, and up to a 3.4-GHz processor with an 865G chipset, so you can game your ass off with substance and style. If you're not satisfied with Cubit's onboard Intel Extreme Graphics video card, feel free to switch it out for a RADEON 9800 XT.

■ Hoojum Cubit P4; prices vary; www.hoojum.com



Color Coordinated

We know you don't want your console out of your site, but what if it came back matching your couch? Then would your girlfriend shut up? ColorWare offers custom paint services for the PS2, Xbox, and GameCube. For \$99, your machine can be rocking a new paint job with colors like Techno, Smoke, Envy, Candy Apple, or Lilac. If you're in the market for a new console, ColorWare can hook you up with a hot looking system right off the bat. If you want to go really insane, you can paint the controllers, too.

■ ColorWare; \$279 (PS2), \$249 (Xbox) \$199 (GameCube); www.colorwarepc.com



Feel the Force

The R440 Force Feedback Wheel from Saitek takes you and your PC racing to a more realistic level. Made to enhance—what else—racing games, Saitek's patented TouchSense technology lets you feel the gravel before you skid out.

With a steering column that includes four wheel-mounted buttons, two gearshift paddles, and the unique gas and brake floor paddles, you'll exert more control over your game. Now you can live your dream and pretend you're Speed Racer while your family is out of the house.

■ Saitek; \$79.95; www.saitek.com

EXTREME



64-BIT

GAMING

Get Amazing 3D Game Play With One Of These Stylish Systemax AMD Athlon 64 PCs Complete With Quality Components, Neon Lights And More !

Systemax recommends Microsoft® Windows® XP

Hottest New Gamers!

Systemax **LIQUID GLOSS**
EXTREME FINISH

These AMD Athlon™ 64 Systems Include

- Microsoft® Windows® XP
- High-Speed AMD ATHLON™ 64 Processor
- 512MB to 1GB High-Speed DDR PC3200 Memory
- CD-RW and DVD or DVD±R/RW
- ATA/100 Hard Drive and 1.44MB Floppy Drive
- Motherboard w/Via K8T800 Chipset (1600MHz FSB)
- Creative Labs 5.1 PCI Sound Card
- ATI or GeForceFX 8X AGP Video with up to 256MB
- 56K V.92 FaxModem, NIC, 4 USB 2.0 and 1 Firewire Port
- Logitech Internet Keyboard and Optical Mouse
- Chieftec Liquid Gloss ATX Case with 2 Blue Neon Light, Blue Intake Fan and 2 Tri-Colored LED Fan
- 400 Watt Power Supply with Blue LED Fan
- Premium One Year Parts & Labor On-Site Warranty*
- Toll-Free Tech Support, ANYTIME!

Build-To Order

Why settle for an off-the-shelf computer when you can have a system that's customized for the way you play? Systemax Build-To-Order offers you literally millions of combinations! A larger hard drive? More memory, better processor? Select additional accessories? We have hundreds of thousands of components in stock and ready to build! In a few days, your custom-designed Systemax Gaming PC will be on its way to your door! Systemax makes it easy to make your dream Gaming PC! Start with this base system featuring the fabulous Chieftec Liquid Gloss case. Then choose from the best components we have to offer. Get a faster processor, add a ton of memory or add a TV Tuner card. It's that simple. Call one of our friendly knowledgeable sales agents or visit our web site. You dream it, we'll build it!

Choose From Three Great Chieftec Liquid Gloss Cases!

AMD Athlon™ 64 Processor 3200+ with Enhanced Virus Protection plus HyperTransport™ Technology and AMD Cool-n-Quiet™ Technology, featuring up to 1600MHz System Bus

- Microsoft® Windows® XP Home
- 1GB PC3200 DDR400
- 80GB Ultra ATA 7200 RPM HD
- CD-RW and DVD-ROM Drives
- ATI Radeon 9800SE 8X AGP Video Card w/128MB

ADD TO CART

Logitech Internet Keyboard and Optical Scroll Mouse

CREATIVE

24/7 TECH SUPPORT
★★★★ FOUR-STAR SERVICE

ONE YEAR
PARTS AND LABOR
ON-SITE SERVICE!

Item #	Description	Price
BTO-036116	Systemax AMD Athlon 64 Build To Order PC ...	\$1199.99

AMD Athlon 64 3000+
With CD-RW And DVD Drives

AMD Athlon™ 64 Processor 3000+ with Enhanced Virus Protection

- HyperTransport™ Technology
- AMD Cool-n-Quiet™ Technology
- 1600MHz System Bus

- Microsoft® Windows® XP Home
- 512MB PC3200 DDR400
- 40GB Ultra ATA 7200 RPM HD
- CD-RW And DVD-ROM Drive
- GeForceFX 5200 8X AGP Video Card w/128MB

\$999⁹⁹

#SYX-XP-036115

ADD TO CART

AMD Athlon 64 3200+
With CD-RW and DVD Drives

AMD Athlon™ 64 Processor 3200+ with Enhanced Virus Protection

- HyperTransport™ Technology
- AMD Cool-n-Quiet™ Technology
- 1600MHz System Bus

- Microsoft® Windows® XP Home
- 1GB PC3200 DDR400
- 80GB Ultra ATA 7200 RPM HD
- CD-RW And DVD-ROM Drive
- ATI Radeon 9800SE 8X Video Card w/128MB

\$1199⁹⁹

#SYX-XP-036116

ADD TO CART

AMD Athlon 64 3200+
With DVD±RW Drive

AMD Athlon™ 64 Processor 3200+ with Enhanced Virus Protection

- HyperTransport™ Technology
- AMD Cool-n-Quiet™ Technology
- 1600MHz System Bus

- Microsoft® Windows® XP Professional
- 1GB PC3200 DDR400
- 160GB Ultra ATA 7200 RPM HD
- DVD±RW Drive
- GeForceFX 5700 8X AGP Video Card w/256MB

\$1399⁹⁹

#SYX-XP-036117

ADD TO CART

AMD Athlon 64 3400+
With DVD±RW Drive

AMD Athlon™ 64 Processor 3400+ with Enhanced Virus Protection

- HyperTransport™ Technology
- AMD Cool-n-Quiet™ Technology
- 1600MHz System Bus

- Microsoft® Windows® XP Professional
- 1GB PC3200 DDR400
- 200GB Ultra ATA 7200 RPM HD
- DVD±RW Drive
- GeForceFX 5950 8X AGP Video w/256MB

\$1799⁹⁹

#SYX-XP-036118

ADD TO CART

TigerDirect.com

SHOP ONLINE AT: www.tigerdirect.com/MP OR CALL 1-888-946-4739

Please Mention Code:

MLPT0304

Dell Inspiron XPS

The most powerful Trapper Keeper in the world!

www.dell.com

\$2,868

(with promotions)

CPU:

3.4-GHz Intel P4

RAM

1GB PC3200 RAM

Hard Drive

60GB

Optical Drive

4X DVD+RW

Display

15.4-inch Wide-Aspect
UltraSharp TFT Active
Matrix WUXGA

Graphics

128MB ATI MOBILITY
RADEON 9700

High-Speed Ports

Four USB 2.0, FireWire

Warranty/Tech Support

One year

After the successful launch of its desktop gaming machine, the Dimension XPS, Dell has set its sites on the mobile market. The latest Inspiron not only shares the XPS name, but it also sports incredible performance and functionality. We expected as much. From the start, Dell has shown an impressive commitment to the gaming arena, and with the release of the Inspiron XPS, it's obvious they're in it for the long haul.

The first thing you'll notice about this laptop is its ultracool LCD back. The XPS comes in three color schemes; the test unit shown here sports the Cipher design, reminiscent of a Trapper Keeper straight out of the 1980s. Dell knows hardcore gamers want to flaunt their rigs, but QuickSnap designs don't cut it.

The Inspiron XPS gets its oomph from an Intel P4 3.4-GHz processor with Hyper-Threading and an 800-MHz frontside bus. Our test unit had 1GB of RAM, but you can opt for up to 2GB of 400-MHz DDR Dual Channel RAM. Do you need 2GB of RAM? Probably not. At that point, it's just bragging rights. Four USB 2.0 ports, a FireWire port, an 80GB hard drive, and a 4X DVD+RW drive round out this impressive laptop. Other key features include jacks for S-Video, composite video, and DVI, and built-in

802.11b/g wireless, Bluetooth, and Gigabit Ethernet. The Inspiron XPS packs a 5W subwoofer. Hear it with games or music and you'll wonder how you ever played on a laptop without one.

The 15.4-inch widescreen runs at a native resolution of 1920 x 1200 (WUXGA) with an impressive 25-ms response time. Although it's 1.6 inches smaller than the Voodoo Envy M:780 (see *opposite page*), the 128MB ATI MOBILITY RADEON 9700 video card lends games and applications a stellar appeal.

Taking a nod from Alienware, Dell will allow users to upgrade their graphics chip as new technology becomes available. Instead of letting you install it yourself (like Alienware), Dell will send a service technician to your house.

He or she will bring a couple of hitches: The technician will perform this upgrade one time only, and Dell will charge you for the service. Didn't your mother tell you nothing in life is free?

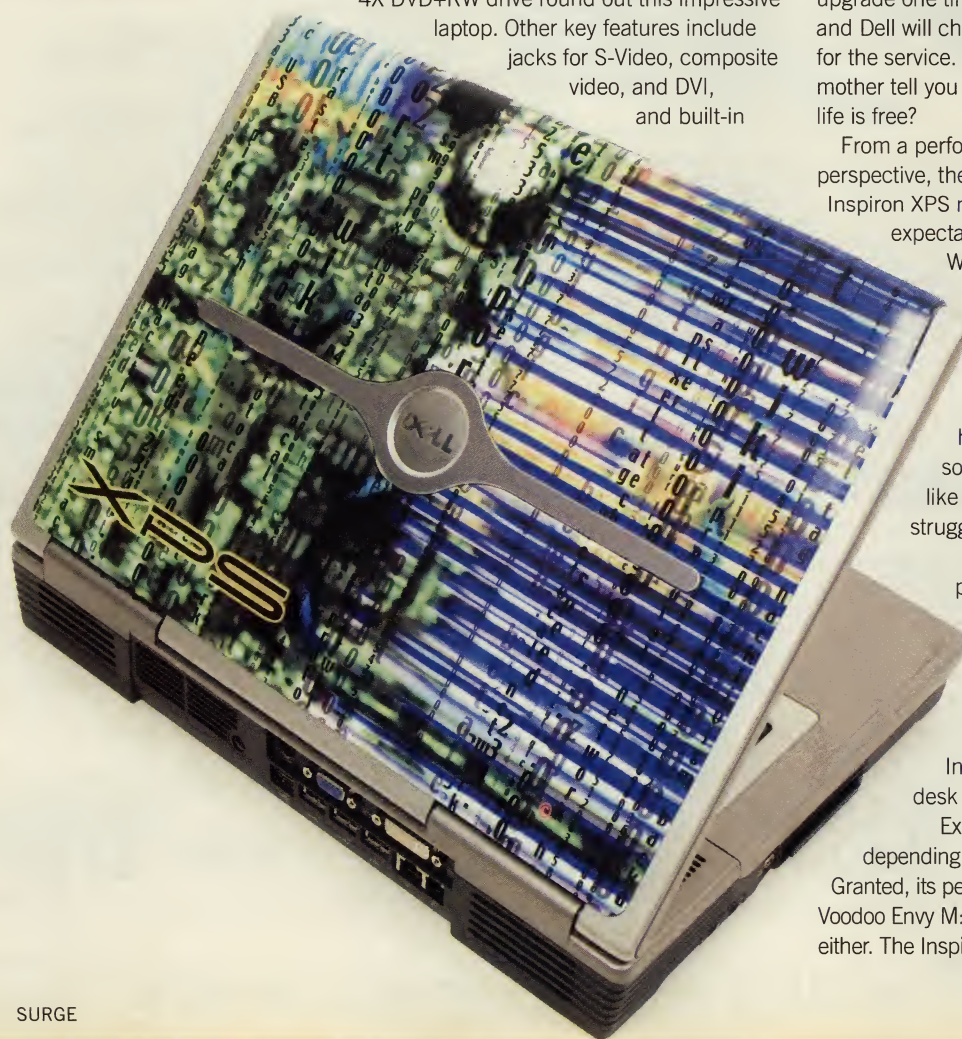
From a performance perspective, the Inspiron XPS met our expectations.

With a PCMark04 score of 4,958 and a 3DMark03 score of 2,477, this bad boy will hold its own on the latest games and applications. We were able to play *Unreal Tournament 2004* at 1280 x 1024 with no hiccups; at 1600 x 1200, it dropped some frames. Resource intensive games like *Far Cry* made the Inspiron XPS struggle more than we would have liked.

As for overall convenience and portability, we give the Inspiron XPS a thumbs down. It weighs a hefty 9.4 pounds, and the battery lasts a mere 1.5 hours. You can forget about watching a full-length DVD on a cross-country flight; we see the Inspiron XPS spending more time on a desk than on the road.

Expect to pay upwards of \$3,000, depending on how you spec out your machine.

Granted, its performance wasn't as stellar as the Voodoo Envy M:780, but it doesn't cost nearly as much, either. The Inspiron XPS is a very respectable laptop.



PROS

Great video card

Subwoofer action

DVI ports

Built-in wireless

CONS

Heavy

Poor battery life

Unappealing design

Voodoo Envy M:780

Bow down to the master

www.voodooopc.com

\$4,999

CPU
3.4-GHz P4 Extreme Edition

RAM
1GB PC3200 DRAM

Hard Drive
120GB

Optical Drive
DVD+RW

Display
17-inch WXGA+

Graphics
ATI 256MB MOBILITY RADEON 9700

High-Speed Ports
Two USB, three FireWire

Warranty/Tech Support
One year



S-Video, and a shocking 120GB hard drive. Actually, it's two 60GB drives running at 7,200 rpm in a RAID stripe. This feature alone boosts your performance up to 40 percent. (It's okay, take a moment and catch your breath.)

If the specs don't impress you, the LCD and video card will. Whereas the Inspiron XPS houses the 128MB ATI MOBILITY RADEON 9700, Voodoo cranks it up a notch with the 256MB version of the ATI MOBILITY RADEON 9700. Combine that with a larger widescreen (17 inches with a native resolution of 1440 x 900 WXGA+), and you can say sayonara to every other laptop on the market. Like the Inspiron XPS, the Voodoo will let you upgrade your graphics board. The only downside is you have to send the unit to Voodoo for them to perform the installation.

The M:780's benchmark performance bounded over our high expectations. On the PCMark04, it scored a 5,038, besting the Inspiron XPS by a mere 80 points. The differential widened on the 3DMark03, where the M:780 scored an incredible 3,518 (1,041 points higher than the XPS). *Unreal Tournament 2004* at 1600 x 1200? Not a problem. *Far Cry* at 1280 x 1024 was choppy in some areas, but it ran pretty smooth overall. Bottom line: This laptop is a gamer's dream, but this performance doesn't come cheap.

Prospective buyers should note the M:780's few shortcomings. The biggest issue is its temperature. After an hour or so of use, we noticed the keyboard and palm rests became uncomfortably, although not unbearably, warm. We blame the thin and compact chassis, which leaves the hardware little space to breathe. The battery life is horrible. In our tests, it lasted just over an hour (compared to the XPS' 90 minutes).

Remember when we said that performance doesn't come cheap? To have this beast at your beck and call, it's going to cost you upwards of \$5,000. That could buy you a semester of college, but the M:780 is guaranteed to take all other laptops to school.

Voodoo (the PC company, not the practice of sacrificing chickens to ancestors) never ceases to amaze us. With a never-ending supply of streamlined designs and top-of-the-line parts, Voodoo is definitely the company that its competitors should fear most.

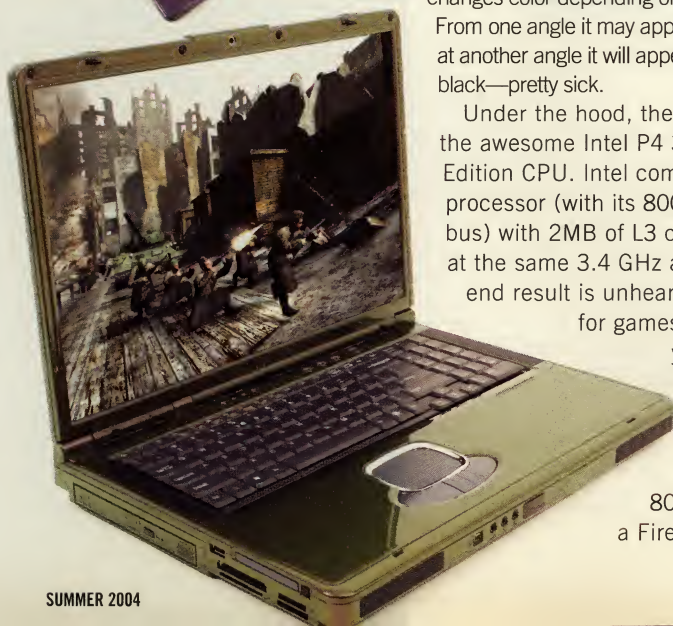
Dell made a good impression with the new Inspiron XPS laptop, but Voodoo fires back like a tank with the Envy M:780. In a word, the M:780 is extraordinary. Not only did it outperform the XPS in all of our benchmarks, but it also looked damn good doing it.

Voodoo's custom paint jobs are its calling card. Our test M:780's high-gloss, chameleon paint job took our breath away. By "chameleon," we mean the laptop actually changes color depending on how you look at it.

From one angle it may appear dark purple, while at another angle it will appear dark green or black—pretty sick.

Under the hood, the Envy M:780 has the awesome Intel P4 3.4-GHz Extreme Edition CPU. Intel combines the 3.4 GHz processor (with its 800-MHz frontside bus) with 2MB of L3 cache operating at the same 3.4 GHz as the core. The end result is unheard of performance for games. Additionally,

you'll find 1GB of dual-channel PC3200 memory, built-in Bluetooth and 802.11b/g wireless, a FireWire port, DVI,



PROS

P4 Extreme Edition

256MB video card

Large screen

Great performance

Magnificent paint job

CONS

Only two USB ports

Poor battery life

Runs hot

No easily accessed volume control

TAKING NEW TERRITORY FOR STAR WARS

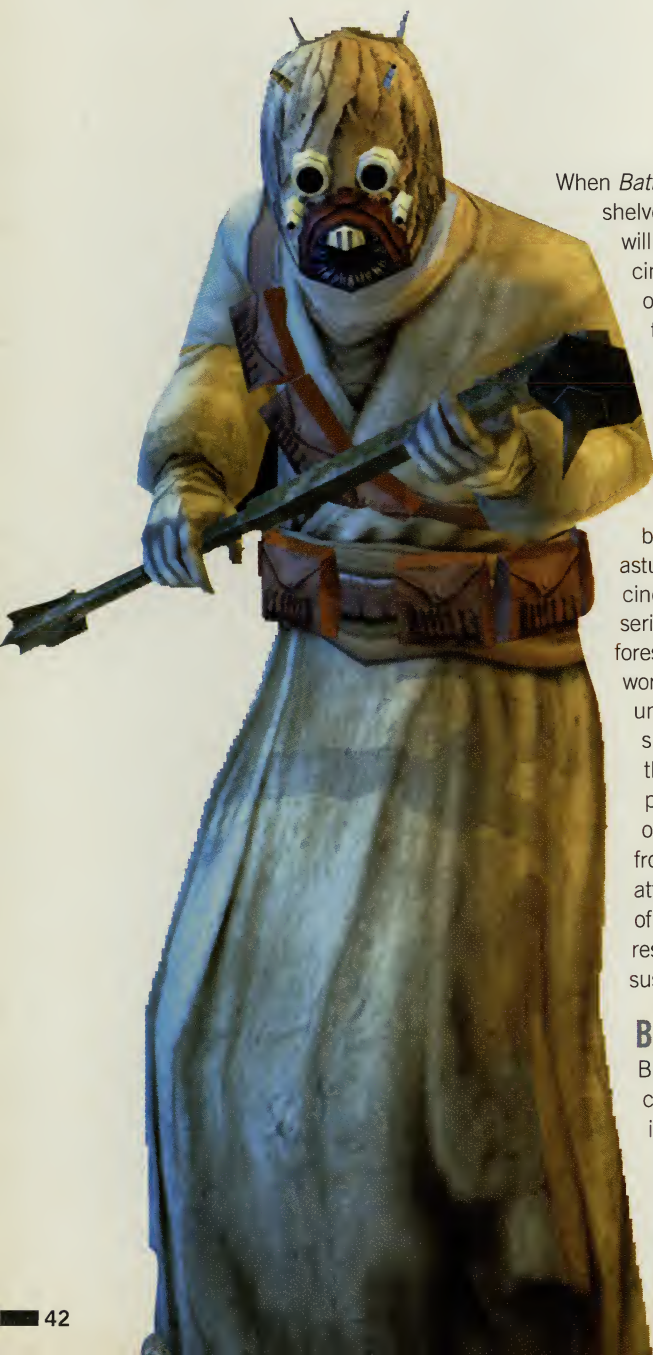
**Pandemic brings
ground pounding
to LucasArts'
galaxy in Star
Wars Battlefront.**

by George T. Chronis

Convincing George Lucas to give you a green light to develop a *Star Wars* videogame should be all it takes to put you on the gaming map as a capital. A franchise so unconditionally beloved and insatiably craved by millions pretty much guarantees developers a built-in audience, even through the hard times of the new trilogy. Pandemic, the Los Angeles-based developer responsible for *Battlezone* and *Dark Reign II*, has long struggled to get its just desserts, and with the upcoming *Star Wars Battlefront*, its designers have their fingers crossed.



“LOOK AT BATTLEFIELD 1942 AND HOW WELL THAT GAME HAS DONE. WHAT IF WE HAD THAT KIND OF GRUNT EXPERIENCE COMBINED WITH THE GREATEST BATTLES FROM STAR WARS?” —ERIC GEWIRTZ, DIRECTOR



When *Battlefront* hits the shelves this fall, players will feast on an overtly cinematic masterpiece of otherworldly carnage that just might include clipping Ewoks. Tackling the massive and massively legendary *Star Wars* battle scenes is no small feat, but Pandemic, with an astute eye to detail and cinematics, does the film series proud. In the dense forest of Yavin IV, one of ten worlds in the *Battlefront* universe, spare rays of sunshine barely break through the trees as players dodge the hail of unfriendly fire blasting from all directions and attempt to make sense of utter chaos. Can the rest of *Battlefront* hope to sustain this momentum?

Building Respect

Back when Pandemic's core of developers were in two different teams at Activision, they helped pioneer the fusion of first-person action and real-time

strategy in 1997's *Battlezone* and unleashed one of the most ambitious RTS games ever that same year with *Dark Reign*. It was a no-brainer for Activision to combine the teams, and in 1998, Pandemic Studios was born. With guaranteed distribution for *Battlezone II* and *Dark Reign II* through Activision, few of the studios emerging that year could boast such a solid start.

Critical acclaim did not translate into dollar signs. *Battlezone* and *Dark Reign* both developed devoted followings that continue to flourish seven years later, but modest sales have prevented Pandemic from climbing to the same level as Blizzard, Valve, or id.

The respect for what Pandemic achieved didn't go unnoticed within the game industry, however. As *Battlezone II* was in development, Pandemic pitched LucasArts on the potential of marrying its brand of strategic battlefield action and player/vehicle interaction with the *Star Wars* universe. LucasArts didn't bite, but the pitch, and Pandemic's reputation, made an impression.

When LucasArts needed a developer to translate the huge battles from *Episode II: Attack of the Clones* into a videogame, the publisher went back to Pandemic and cut a deal with the studio to create *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*, which went on to achieve considerable success.

Despite their satisfaction with *The Clone Wars*, Pandemic director Eric Gewirtz and producer Greg Borrud felt strongly that there was much more they could have done with the concept.

"Look at *Battlefield 1942* and how well that game has done," Gewirtz points out. "What if we had that kind of grunt experience combined with the greatest battles from *Star Wars*? Something a little more strategically involved than a shooter, but a little less strategically intense than an RTS. We've been doing that kind of game for years with *Battlezone* and *Dark Reign*, and we were dying to do it with *Star Wars*."

Since both LucasArts and Pandemic viewed their *Clone Wars* relationship fondly, Pandemic president Josh Resnick thought it was time to pitch a new *Star Wars* game. The plan was to bring the action down to the individual trooper while including both the classic Imperial and prequel Republican eras from the films.

LucasArts producer Jim Tso was impressed with how well the proposal captured the battlefield dynamic from the movies. After working with Pandemic on *The Clone Wars*, he was partial to the work ethic evident throughout the company.

"As third parties go, these guys are extremely professional," Tso says. "They take their schedules very seriously, and they take great care in their work. Something I really appreciate is how they always are focused on our game. Not their game, but our game as a team."

Star Wars Battlefront was born.



With *Star Wars Battlefront*, the epic battles from the films will finally be playable on a proper scale.

Under the Hood

Pandemic has a separate team of programmers constantly developing the studio's core technology libraries. Each team can adapt the code from these libraries. While *Full Spectrum Warrior* and *Battlefront* may have a lot in common at the starting line, the individual game engines diverge from each other as play goes on. Yet, there is enough in common that a new programming or design trick can be useful elsewhere.

"We really try to share creative ideas with other teams," Pandemic producer Greg Borrud says. "Whenever we make a change in technology we share that with the other teams, since at a base level, we share the same tech."

Pandemic's ongoing investment in technology returns benefits in addition to efficiency. One look at the PS2 version of *Battlefront* provides plenty of proof. Not since *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* has a PS2 game generated a buzz for its graphics.

"We have very good programmers," Borrud explains. "They've been given the time to work extensively on low-level PS2 technology libraries, but not for any particular game. So we're getting a lot more out of the hardware than we otherwise would, like dynamic lighting effects."

Galactic Conquest

With *Battlefront*, the battles unfold planet by planet. The game is expected to feature ten planets total, with up to two maps per planet. Expect the usual battlegrounds from the films: Tatooine, Yavin, Naboo, Kamino, and of course, Hoth. (What *Star Wars* title would be complete without the snowy ice shelves of Hoth?) The goal of each battle is to drive the opponent's forces off the map. Like an extended capture-the-flag mode, sides push up the map, taking command centers in between, until the enemy base is taken.

The command centers are much more than the eye-catching, glowing holographic markers they appear to be. Taking and holding these command centers is critical. The AI supplies both sides as they take damage or casualties, but the rate of supply is dictated by the number of command centers players hold. Centers in the middle of the map are initially neutral. If you stay bottled up in your landing zone and let the enemy advance, you'll face a continuous stream of superior numbers hurtling toward you.

However, start taking command centers, and the balance shifts.

Left to its own devices, the AI will play like individual players would in the game, attacking and supporting as the need or opportunity arises. However, in solo games players will have a rudimentary set of commands to give AI cohorts: attack, defend, take objective, retreat, etc.

Pandemic plans to offer six playable characters per each of the four sides: Republic, Trade Federation, Rebel, and Imperial. Common between each side are soldier, pilot, and sniper classes. From there, the character classes become more individualized to include Wookiee smugglers, jet troopers, Rebel spies, Droideka destroyer droids, Imperial antivehicle specialists, and clone commanders.

Gewirtz is especially fond of the jet trooper, a character that doesn't appear in the *Attack of the Clones* film, but one the team suggested to Tso, who encouraged them to make the idea work.

"We sat around and thought, 'Wow, we can probably do a Jango Fett thing,'" Gewirtz

Battlefront will feature many land- and air-based vehicles, like the AT-ST below.





- ▶ **7,800+** Customer Testimonials
- ▶ **A** Rating on **ANY** Merchant Ranking Site
- ▶ **98%** of Orders Ship within 1 Business Day
- ▶ **84,000+** Product Reviews From Customers



Best Value, Always!

FREE SHIPPING*
FedEx Super Saver Shipping

Monitors



SONY

\$459.00

SDM-S73/B

- 17" TFT Active Matrix LCD • SXGA 1280x1024
- New Stylish Lightweight Design
- Digital Multiscan Technology



\$661.00

191T Silver

- 19" a-si TFT LCD 1280x1024
- Dual CPU Input Analog/Digital
- Internal Power Supply
- Pivot Technology



\$137.00

CTX VL700B

- 17" CRT Invar Shadow Mask
- 1280x1024 @ 67Hz
- ARAG® Screen Treatment

Intel

intel



\$194.00

Pentium 4 2.8EGHz

- 800MHz FSB • 1MB L2 Cache
- Socket 478 • Heatsink & Fan Included
- Hyper Threading Technology



\$228.00

Pentium 4 3.0CGHz

- 800MHz FSB 512K L2
- Cache Hyper Threading Technology



\$164.00

D875PBZLK FMB 1.5

- 875P Chipset Motherboard for Intel Socket 478
- Pentium 4 Extreme Edition

Notebooks



SONY



VAIO Z1WAMP

- Intel Pentium-M 1.7GHz • 14.1" TFT
- 512GB Memory 60GB Hard Drive
- DVD/CD-RW Optical Drive • Windows XP Pro



TOSHIBA

\$1689.00

Portégé M200

- Intel Pentium-M 1.5GHz
- 12.1" TFT 512MB Memory
- 40GB Hard Drive
- Windows XP Tablet PC



Pavilion ZD7001US

- Intel Pentium4 3.06GHz
- 17" TFT 512MB DDR SDRAM
- CD-RW/DVD+R/RW Combo Drive
- 80GB HD Windows XP Home

Networking

NETGEAR



\$89.99

WGT624

- 108Mbps Wireless Firewall Router
- IEEE 802.3 • One 10/100 Mbps WAN Port
- Four 10/100 Mbps Ethernet LAN Ports

NETGEAR



\$86.99

GS105

- 5-Port Ethernet Switch Ports
- High-speed Auto-Sensing
- Full-Duplex Connections
- Supports PC or Mac OS

LINKSYS
A Division of Cisco Systems, Inc.



\$39.99

EZXS55W

- 5-Port 10/100 Mbps Auto-Sensing Ports w/ Both Half and Full Duplex Modes

Cases

Antec



\$105.00

Sonata Life Style Series

- Mid Tower Piano Black • Standard ATX
- 380 Watts Power Supply
- 0.8mm SECC Steel



\$180.00

V6000A

- Silver Xaser V Damier Full Tower Case Tool-Free Slider
- PCI Long Card Bracket



\$83.00

CS-800TA-S

- Silver ATX Mid Tower Case
- Patent Adjustable Fan
- Speed Dial on Side Panel

Speakers

Logitech



\$65.00

Z640

- 5.1 Speakers
- 71.2 Watts RMS 35Hz-20kHz
- Remote via Center Speaker

NETGEAR



\$360.00

ProMedia Ultra 5.1

- Personal Audio System
- 60 Watts Per Channel
- Wired Remote Control

CREATIVE



\$13.00

SBS230 2.0 Speakers

- 3 Watts RMS Built-in Bass Port Magnetically-Shielded Speakers - OEM

APC
Legendary Reliability



\$46.00

Back-UPS ES350

350VA Back-UPS

Shuttle



\$272.00

SB61G2 XPC Barebone System for Socket 478

800MHz FSB Intel CPU

ENERMAX



\$90.00

Noisetaker Series

- 420 Watts Power Supply
- ATX 12V V1.3 Compatible

Antec



\$84.00

TRUEBLUE 480

- 480 Watts Power Supply w/ Blue LED Fan

Logitech



\$75.00

Cordless MX Duo

- Wireless Optical 104 Keys + 12 Function Keys

Microsoft



\$40.00

S82-00001

- Multimedia Keyboard
- 102 Keys + 17 Function Keys
- USB/PS2 Wheel Mouse Optical OEM



Battlefront includes classic battles and skirmishes from the new trilogy.

recalls. "It took us two days to code, and what we got was a blast. But, the character was too powerful, so we went back to see how we could work him into the game. To balance his rocket pack advantage with the tactics and abilities of other characters, we made his weapons range much more limited."

The game will feature assistance from neutral factions. On Tatooine, Jawas will bring ammo and health power-ups. On Endor, Ewoks can enter the fray on the Rebel side.

"There is nothing more humiliating than to be playing as a stormtrooper and to find yourself killed by an Ewok," Tso admits with a chuckle.

If you can be killed by an Ewok, can you return the favor?

"That's the question we get asked the most on forums and in e-mail," Tso says. "It's not a feature that we're broadcasting loudly, but yes, you can kill

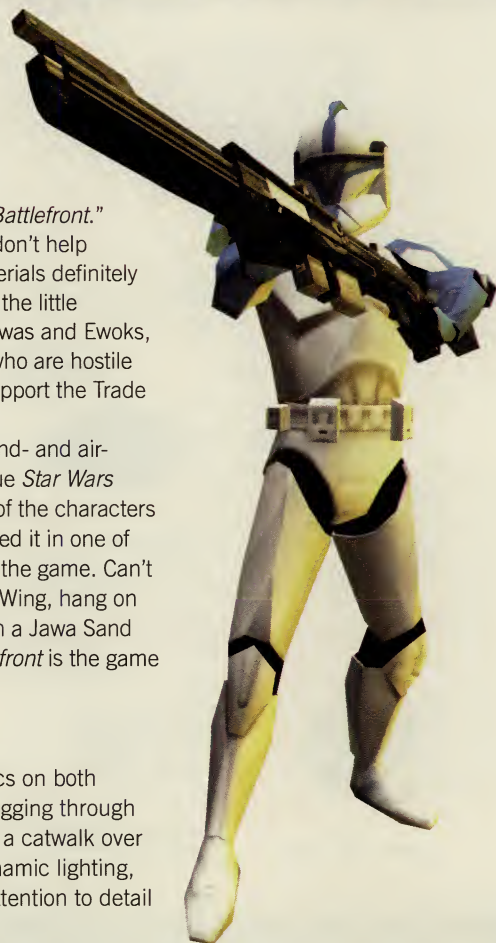
Ewoks, Jawas, and other factions in *Battlefront*."

Gewirtz agrees that Rebel players don't help themselves by killing Ewoks, but Imperials definitely have an incentive to "fry" as many of the little buggers as possible. In addition to Jawas and Ewoks, players can expect Tusken Raiders, who are hostile to everyone, and Geonosians, who support the Trade Federation.

Battlefront's astonishing array of land- and air-based vehicles will excite even the true *Star Wars* connoisseur. Pick an episode: If any of the characters have flown, driven, or otherwise steered it in one of the films, you'll get to do the same in the game. Can't wait to climb into the cockpit of an X-Wing, hang on for dear life to a Speeder Bike, or turn a Jawa Sand Crawler into a moving fortress? *Battlefront* is the game for you.

Enjoying the View

The best way to describe the graphics on both platforms is lush. Whether you're slogging through the jungles of Yavin or skirting along a catwalk over the foaming seas of Kamino, the dynamic lighting, rain, and water effects and overall attention to detail rival reality.



"We sat down with the artists and looked very closely at the movies for a long time," Gewirtz says. "It was very important that we captured the look and feel because God knows we'll hear about it from fans if we get it wrong. So the artists have worked very closely with the programmers, and I think the results show up on the screen."

Exactly how players should view these environments and from what perspective they should conduct the battle were the big question marks. Borrud says there was no clear choice, so *Battlefront* will support third-person and first-person perspectives.

"When you first pick up the game, third person is the way to go," Borrud suggests. "You just want to see everything. Then, as you get further into the game and [become] more competitive, you start switching to first person more often. Shooter style is definitely the choice when getting into multiplayer."

The More, the Merrier

Online multiplayer matches are a major focus of the game. The PS2 and Xbox will support 16-player games, and the PC will double the guns (that's 32 players, for you math burnouts). As the game stands now, PC players will be able to host servers that admit console players. Downloadable content will appear on the Xbox and PC, but Pandemic has yet to find such support for the PS2. Platform-specific content, like an X-Wing, is up in the air; it may or may not be available.

**"IT WAS
VERY
IMPORTANT
THAT WE
CAPTURED
THE LOOK
AND FEEL
BECAUSE
GOD
KNOWS
WE'LL
HEAR
ABOUT
IT FROM
FANS IF
WE GET
IT WRONG"**

—ERIC GEWIRTZ



Finally, a *Star Wars* game that lets you "accidentally" shoot Ewoks.

SPREADING THE DECK WITH MERCENARIES

Another LucasArts game under design by a different team at Pandemic will be dropping to a landing zone a little closer to home than *Star Wars Battlefront*. *Mercenaries*, while not part of the *Star Wars* universe, shares some of the same passion for ground missions, plus a selection of intriguing characters that can use all manner of different vehicles and weapons.

Set a few years down the road, *Mercenaries* expands on today's brewing geopolitical conflicts and provides much more up-close and personal combat. Using the Most Wanted card deck metaphor used by US forces in Iraq, *Mercenaries* features 52 missions, with each playing card signifying a faction leader to be terminated.

The primary theater of operations is North Korea, where a putsch attempt is under way. The origin and political affiliation of the contractor that hires the player to eliminate each of the 52 targets is purposefully fuzzy.

To carry out each mission, players can choose between three playable characters; a Swedish or American male operative or a British female operative. Each character will have special talents that make them attractive for specific missions.

Mercenaries' most tantalizing feature is the scope of environmental interactivity. The goal is to make any item that can be seen in the game useable; that includes more than 20 civilian, aerial, and combat vehicles, plus more than 30 weapons. Tanks, cars, assault rifles, helicopters, shotguns, jeeps, rocket launchers—you name it.

A number of NPC classes can be tapped or used during missions, including members of the Russian underworld and Chinese operatives. Meanwhile, a foreign correspondent reports on the carnage following a completed mission and expounds upon the political ramifications.

Mercenaries is slated for a fall or winter release on the PS2 and Xbox.



As much as he likes the way the AI performs in solo play, Gewirtz is most excited about the multiplayer aspects of the game.

"You can play cooperatively along the single-player path or create your own meta-game of galactic conquest, choosing the planets as you go," Gewirtz explains. "Already, we've seen these really involved contests get rolling in multiplayer testing that are amazing. Teams communicating with headsets really works well."

To further support such online battles, players have the option of fortifying some of their captured command centers, building up the locations to make them more defensible, and setting up ammo and health power-up dispensers. Often times new tactics and strategy are discovered in multiplayer testing, after which the team immediately goes back and retools the AI with new moves to add to the single-player game.

Gewirtz takes the most pride in how *Battlefront's* multiplayer matches capture the scale from the films. "*Star Wars* has always been about the cinematic experience," he says. "It's a powerful feeling when you're the stormtrooper on point, inching up to where you think the enemy lines are, and you sense the towering presence of an AT-ST looming beside you, driven by a member of your team, taking the lead and drawing enemy fire."

Pandemic Spreading

Given the uniformly positive reporting on *Full Spectrum Warrior* during the past year and the huge attention lavished on any *Star Wars* title, Pandemic is making fans outside the industry, and the studio may finally receive the recognition it deserves. If *Battlefront* is a success, is the LucasArts/Pandemic team ready for a sequel? Tso says if it makes sense financially, he definitely has ideas for where to take the series. At Pandemic, Borrud and Gewirtz say they are nowhere close to *Star Wars* burnout.

"I have one more *Star Wars* game in me, at least," Gewirtz proclaims. "*Battlefront* has opened up so many possibilities and cool ideas that I'd like to take another bite out of this universe. *Star Wars* is so big, with such a huge history, that there is plenty of freedom and [it would be] a creative challenge to work on another game. Just think how cool it would be to design a Rebel assault tank." ☺



Supporting Cast

The team struggled with whether or not to include a Jedi class. Like hero characters, the conclusion was that Jedi would be too powerful, and too many people would want to play them. Yet, Borrud admits that the game needs heroes and Jedi to feel right. The solution was to add hero characters as NPCs.

"Yeah, it's cool to be a Jedi, but that's been done," Borrud points out. "It's even more fun to be a stormtrooper running right behind Darth Vader as he hacks and slashes rebels with his lightsaber."

How do you stop a rampaging Luke Skywalker or Count Dooku, who are adept at blocking blaster fire until they get close enough to cut you down? Tossing thermal detonators in their path and gunning it back to your forward lines is highly recommended.

AMD Athlon™ 64 Processor



The Only Windows®-compatible 64-bit PC processor

- Industry-leading performance today, with readiness for the future
- Revolutionary processor design maximizes performance and system efficiency
- Astonishing, true-to-life digital entertainment experience



Athlon™ 64 3400+
1MB L2 Cache
64-bit Processor
Model# ADA3400BOX

\$416.00



Athlon™ 64 3200+
1MB L2 Cache
64-bit Processor
Model# ADA3200BOX

\$282.00



Athlon™ 64 3000+
512KB L2 Cache
64-bit Processor
Model# ADA3000BOX

\$223.00



\$404.00
Athlon™ 64 3400+
1MB L2 Cache
64-bit Processor
Model# ADA3400AEP5AP
OEM



\$270.00
Athlon™ 64 3200+
1MB L2 Cache
64-bit Processor
Model# ADA3200AEP5AP
OEM



\$211.00
Athlon™ 64 3000+
512KB L2 Cache
64-bit Processor
Model# ADA3000AEP4AP
OEM

Motherboards



\$155.00
ASUS VIA K8T800
Chipset for AMD Socket 754 CPU
Model# K8V Deluxe



MSI VIA K8T800
Chipset for AMD Socket 754 CPU
Model# K8T Neo-FIS2R
\$125.00



\$217.00
Gigabyte nForce3 150
Chipset for AMD Socket 940 CPU
Model# GA-K8NXP-940

Video Cards



\$232.00
ATI Radeon 9800 Pro
128MB DDR 256-bit 8x AGP



\$168.00
eVGA nVidia GeForce FX5700 Ultra
128MB DDR2 Model# 128-A8-N336-AX

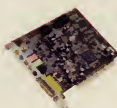


\$169.95
ATI AIW Radeon 9600
128MB DDR 8x AGP w/ Remote
Model# 100-714116

Sound Cards



\$89.00
Creative Labs Sound Blaster Audigy2 ZS
PCI Sound Card Model# SB0350

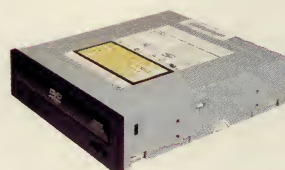


Creative Labs Sound Blaster Live! 5.1
PCI Sound Card Model# SB0226
\$30.00



\$16.00
AOpen 5.1 Channel
PCI 2.1 Sound Card Model# Cobra AW850

CD/DVD ROMs



\$31.00
Sony 16x DVD-ROM Drive
Model# DDU1612/B2
OEM



\$32.50
Lite-On 16x DVD-ROM Drive
Model# XJ-HD166 BLACK
OEM



\$19.00
Samsung 52x CD-ROM Drive
Model# SC-152GEBB
OEM



Shoppers' Choice Award 2003 Best Place To Buy Components

AMD Athlon™ 64 FX Processor



The Only Windows®-compatible 64-bit PC processor

- The first 64-bit PC Processor in a class by itself designed specifically for cinematic computing
- Only AMD 64 technology runs today's 32-bit and tomorrow's 64-bit software
- Full throttle technology for immersive gaming and amazing digital media



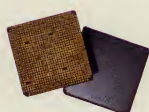
Athlon™ 64 FX-53
1MB L2 Cache
64-bit Processor
Model# ADAFX53DEP5AT
OEM

\$785.00



Athlon™ 64 FX-51
1MB L2 Cache
64-bit Processor
Model# ADAFX51BOX

\$745.00



AMD Opteron™ Model 244
1MB L2 Cache
64-bit Processor
Model# OSA244CEP5AL
OEM

\$441.00



AMD Opteron™ Model 244
1MB L2 Cache
64-bit Processor
Model# OSA244BOX

\$461.00



AMD Opteron™ Model 246
1MB L2 Cache
64-bit Processor
Model# OSA246BOX

\$689.00

Memory



\$106.00

Kingston PC-3200 184
Pin 512MB DDR SDRAM



\$104.00

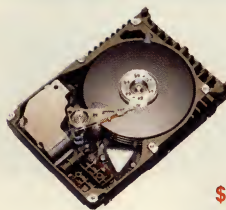
Geil Value Series PC-3200
184 Pin 512MB DDR - OEM



\$58.00

Crucial PC-2700 4T 184
Pin 256MB DDR SDRAM - OEM

Hard Drives



\$73.00

Seagate 80GB 7200RPM
IDE Ultra ATA100 2MB Buffer
Model# ST380011A - OEM



\$72.00

Western Digital 80GB
Special Edition 7200RPM IDE
8MB Buffer WD800JB - OEM



\$59.50

Maxtor 40GB 7200RPM
IDE Ultra ATA133 2MB Buffer
Model# 6E040L0 - OEM

CD/DVD RWs



\$89.00

NEC 8x DVD±RW Drive
Model# ND-2500A - OEM



\$170.00

Plextor 8x DVD±RW
Drive Model# PX-708A/SW-BL



\$37.00

Lite-On 52x32x52
CD-RW Drive ATAPI/E-IDE
Model# LTR-52327S - OEM



\$35.00

Infogames Unreal
Tournament 2004



\$37.00

EA Games Battlefield
Vietnam (Ibox)



\$42.00

Activision
Call of Duty



\$24.00

Sierra Half Life
Platinum Edition 2



Best Value, Always!





LOVE & ROCKETS

The stuff that makes girl gamers tick. by Scott Steinberg

Don't believe the stereotypes: in this day and age, females not only play games, but they do so voraciously. Computer and console software sales reached a combined \$7 billion last year; the Entertainment Software Association (ESA) estimates that women accounted for a remarkable 57 percent and 47 percent of these purchases, respectively. Could this be mothers and girlfriends surprising guys with the latest games? What's the real story?

"There's this popular misconception that the hobby is strictly for teenage males," chuckles Schelley Olhava, an analyst for IDC, which is an advisory firm that predicts technology trends. "Frankly, that couldn't be further from the truth." Surveys indicate that girls aged six to 17 represent 12 percent of all interactive entertainment enthusiasts, while women aged 18 and older compose an additional 26 percent. Point taken. However, facts and figures don't say nearly as much as lady gamers themselves. Thus, it was with sincerity and open minds that we asked four representatives from the gaming community to come forward and offer their takes on where women stand.

“THE GAMING INDUSTRY DEFINITELY NEEDS AND WANTS MORE WOMEN INVOLVED. I DON’T SEE ANY LIMITATIONS THERE.”

—JANE JENSEN

The Designer

A thriving market exists amongst lady gamers. Consider *The Sims*: half of its 11 million-strong user base can wear pantyhose without attracting undue attention. But, by and large, the female’s presence isn’t registering with game developers, says *Gabriel Knight* creator Jane Jensen.

“Walk into any Egghead or CompUSA, and it’s horrifying how limited the selection of product is,” laments the renowned designer, who’s currently working on an undisclosed project for DreamCatcher Interactive. “Most game manufacturers cater exclusively to a young male audience. They know and admit it freely.”

Label it a gross oversight, since 80 percent of those who favor downloadable online amusements are, in fact, females. Even the leading MMORPG, *EverQuest*, which boasts 430,000 subscribers, enjoys an 18 percent female following. The problem, as Jensen sees it, is that most publishers just can’t get a handle on what it is that most girls demand from their diversions.

“Women don’t have three hours an evening to get into something heavy,” she says. “They want something that’s fun and relaxing to play for an hour, after the kids are in bed or on their lunch break.” A passionate believer in such titles, she’s recently formed Oberon Media, a new company that specifically targets casual gamers, an audience largely comprised of females, with accordingly lighthearted, yet addictive, offerings.

Jensen, an acclaimed author and lauded tale-teller, hasn’t forgotten what made her famous in the first place. “I’m also working on a larger adventure game series that’s much like [previous efforts],” she says. “Women tend to be big readers and want to get emotionally involved with characters and a gripping storyline. An adventure game is an interactive version of a novel.”

Clearly, Jensen hopes more ambitious sirens will follow in her footsteps. “The gaming industry

definitely needs and wants more women involved,” she says. “I don’t see any limitations there. The key is just making products girls like, ones that make them think, ‘Cool! I want to do that someday!’”

The TV Star

Morgan Webb, the popular television personality and co-host of TechTV’s *X-Play*, sees the situation similarly. “We need more female gamers,” she asserts, arguing that gender has no bearing on a person’s ability to enjoy games. “I don’t know any women with a negative impression of gaming. Maybe some get annoyed if their boyfriends or husbands play for hours on end, but hey, that would upset me, too.”

Where most people see a gender gap, Webb sees social conditioning. “It takes a while to become interested in gaming,” she says. “Your friends have to turn you onto it, and you have to spend hours learning



Morgan Webb, co-host of TechTV’s *X-Play*, expects girls to get more involved with gaming as it moves further into the mainstream.



THE RULES OF ATTRACTION

Turn any female into a gaming partner with these simple steps.

Like Britney and Madonna, women and videogames don't always make comfortable bedfellows. Just because that special someone currently finds eyebrow waxes less painful than fragging doesn't mean you can't change her perceptions of gaming. With a little luck, a lot of finesse, and yes, even a little canoodling, you, too, can turn your girl into a joystick junkie. We consulted GameGal.com co-founder Libe Goad for the inside scoop. As she admits, not all females will fall for the following tricks. As for those that don't? Who needs 'em anyway!

Play Dirty

Deception is a guy gamer's best friend. "Surprise hesitant subjects," Goad says. "It'll work in your favor by giving them less time to think about the situation." She cautions that technology can be intimidating when you don't understand it. Cleverness pays: convince your gal *Sex and the City* is on, slip a PlayStation 2 pad into her hand, and nonchalantly switch channels—it'll take her at least a few seconds to tell the difference between Sarah Jessica Parker and Sly Cooper. If all else fails, Goad suggests falling back on the barter system. "Promising her a favor in return works wonders," she says. You know, like flushing at least every other bathroom visit.

The Cuter, the Better

"When picking a title you both can enjoy, stick with something that's based on a colorful, nonthreatening concept she's familiar with," says Goad. Sorry, guys, unless your lady's a Manson, that leaves out *Manhunt*. Alternatives such as *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!*, *Sonic Heroes*, and *Super Monkey Ball* remain fair game. Prospective suitors can't go wrong with platform products, puzzlers, and dancing simulations. The key, advises Goad, is selecting a diversion that evokes fond memories of her childhood. That said, those partial to Japanese imports should be forewarned: anything involving breast-feeding, spankings, or grown men wearing diapers invariably does not count.

Don't Run Up the Score, Jackass

Remember the time you toasted her crushing defeat in *Madden NFL* with a spirited touchdown dance and a noogie? She does, too. Consider toning it down a notch, bruiser. "Women love encouragement when trying something new," notes Goad. "Compliment her ego, be rational and



caring, and eventually, she'll come around." If you're feeling chivalrous (and if you don't make it obvious), letting her win a few rounds or races can't hurt. Avoid becoming competitive; aggression is a trait that women on this side of the Middle Ages seldom appreciate. Keep her feelings foremost in mind, and you can't go wrong.

Go Slow, Use Props

Just because your better half enjoys the odd *Super Mario Sunshine* session, doesn't mean she's ready for *Vice City*. Unlike her intellect, her gaming tastes may mature more slowly than yours. Graduate your gal to something only slightly more sophisticated, like Sony's *EyeToy: Play*, when the opportunity presents itself. "Move in baby steps," Goad comments. "The less of a conceptual leap involved, the better." Given time, she'll eventually proceed to more complex offerings. Should regression occur, however, simply batten down the hatches and hope for the best. "It's a long shot," Goad chuckles, "but someone could always invent a chocolate PlayStation!"

GET A REAL BOX

GET AN *IBOX OWNERS*

**Fire up your
gaming with
blazing speed
and ultra-high
resolution.**

Black Gamerbox Combo with 400watt Power Supply
Intel® D875 800Mhz SATA Bananza Motherboard
Intel® Pentium® 4 3.0GHz with Hyper Threading Technology
512MB DDR PC3200 400MHz Memory CL25
120GB Serial ATA 7200RPM 8Mb Hard Drive
GeForce FX 5950 Ultra 256MB VIVO Video Card
Creative Labs Audigy2 ZS Surround Sound Card
Creative Labs 56k V.92 PCI Modem & 10/100 Ethernet
52x32x52 IDE Internal CD-RW with Black Bezel
16x DVD Player with Black Bezel
1.44 3.5" Internal Floppy
120 Watts - 2-Channel Stereo Speakers
Black PS2 / USB Keyboard
400CPI sensitive 2 Button Scrollable Mouse
Microsoft Windows XP Home Edition
Dual 12" Blue Cold Cathode lights

\$1499

IBOX GAMER



**Lifetime Toll FREE
Technical Support**

HardDrive.com
Your Gaming Resource

IBOX

HAVE MORE FUN!



IBOX ENTRY

Black Gamerbox Case Combo
400 watt P4 Ready Power Supply
Intel® 865GBFLK 800MHz SATA AGP8X Motherboard
Intel® Pentium® 4 2.8GHz 1Mb & Hyper Threading Technology
256MB DDR PC3200 400MHz Memory
80GB 7200 RPM Ultra ATA/100 Hard Drive
Intel® Extreme Graphics 2 Video
SoundMAX 4 XL with AudioESP audio subsystem
56k V.92 PCI Modem & 10/100/1000 Ethernet
52x32x52 IDE Internal CD-RW w/HDC Black Bezel
16x DVD Player with Black Bezel
1.44 3.5" Internal Floppy
120 Watts - 2-Channel Stereo Speakers
Black PS2 / USB Keyboard
400CPI sensitive 2 Button Scrollable Mouse
Microsoft Windows XP Home Edition
Dual 12" Blue Cold Cathode lights
Lifetime Toll FREE Technical Support

\$699

IBOX MID

Black Gamerbox Case Combo
400 watt P4 Ready Power Supply
Intel® 865PERLX P4 800MHz SATA AGP8X ATX Motherboard
Intel® Pentium® 4 2.8GHz 1Mb & Hyper Threading Technology
512MB DDR PC3200 400MHz Memory
120GB Serial ATA 7200RPM 8Mb Hard Drive
GeForce FX5600XT 256MB DDR Video Card
6-channel audio Onboard
56k V.92 PCI Modem & 10/100 Ethernet
52x32x52 IDE Internal CD-RW w/HDC Black Bezel
16x DVD Player with Black Bezel
1.44 3.5" Internal Floppy
120 Watts - 2-Channel Stereo Speakers
Black PS2 / USB Keyboard
400CPI sensitive 2 Button Scrollable Mouse
Microsoft Windows XP Home Edition
Dual 12" Blue Cold Cathode lights
Lifetime Toll FREE Technical Support

\$899

Why Buy From HardDrive.com

- **Excellent Customer Service**
- **Experienced Sales Staff**
- **Intel Trained & Certified Technicians**
- **Toll Free Lifetime Tech Support**
- **Our computers use name brand components for extreme reliability**
- **Over 15,000 Products To Choose From**

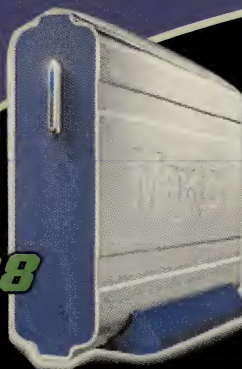


Surge Special!

17" Q71B8 \$109
19" Q95B4 \$169

Get a great deal on a matching monitor.
Prices good with system purchase only

\$188



Simply Smarter Storage With Push Button Backup

- Maxtor OneTouch Personal Storage
- 120GB Capacity
 - 7200 RPM
 - 8MB Cache Buffer
 - USB 2.0 Interface
 - Maxtor 3Year Warranty

TOLL FREE 800-400-3499

ThorTek Corp. 15355 Blackhawk Friendswood, Texas 77546 Lifetime FREE technical support.

Prices & Specs subject to change without notice. Shipping charges are non refundable. Returns may be subject to restocking fee. Products are covered by manufacturers warranty only. We accept all Government PO's. Local calls 281.819.9000 Fax 281.819.9001

Performance may vary depending on the system configuration and software applications used. Intel, Intel Inside, the Intel Inside logo and Pentium are Trademarks or registered trademarks of Intel Corporation or its subsidiaries in the United States and other countries.



Nobody's angel, not even Charlie's. Stevie Case says the novelty factor of being a girl gamer has long since worn off. The appeal, however, has not.

how titles work and letting your fingers get used to the mechanics. This takes weeks upon weeks, usually in those formative teen years when women are talking to each other face to face and men are bonding over an activity."

"If women are to become enamored with the pursuit," she continues, "they need to start when they're young and have the time and patience to practice." The trouble, she says, is that the majority of software targeted at the adolescent female market patronizes consumers. "Most games aimed at younger girls are cheesy and terribly made. These titles do audiences a disservice."

On the bright side, the winds of change are sweeping through industry circles. Most competitions now include categories for women. These are less strenuous, Webb says, but only because females are catching up. "As fast PCs become ubiquitous in every home and kids grow up around first-person shooters, I expect to see many more girls getting involved in the hobby in coming years."

The Player

If anyone can sympathize with those sentiments, it's Stevie Case. The former Ion Storm level designer, *Playboy* pin-up, and professional *Quake* player jumpstarted her career by beating id Software legend John Romero at his own game.

"All my fame came because I was female," admits Case, who now works as a senior project manager for Warner Bros. wireless division. "In the late '90s, being a girl gamer was such a novelty that it generated tremendous media attention."

While a contemporary lady gamer won't likely garner the same amount of attention hoisted on Case when she first started, Case believes ladies are claiming more limelight than ever. "There's a huge segment of women who play games, many of whom enjoy *Doom* and *Unreal Tournament* because of their highly social nature," she says. "When I started out, a professional player could hardly make a living. Now that there are enough sponsors to support several dozen talented personalities, the market will only grow. Hardcore female gamers are finally getting some respect. It's inevitable that they'll eventually carve themselves a comfortable niche."

However, Case, who hosted a segment on the neglected spouses of geeks produced by Gamer.TV, acknowledges that most publishers see girl gamers as a peculiar breed. "The industry hasn't even started to think about how it can serve the female market," she says. "The best thing we, as gamers, can do is to toss the stereotypes aside. Before more women will join in the fun, we need to convince them that this is a valid and enjoyable entertainment medium."

The challenge won't be easy, as Case admits. "Companies need to stop representing videogames as suitable only for prepubescent boys," she says. "It's time we sent a message out across the board, letting people know the pastime isn't just for kids."

The Publisher

For more than eight years, Her Interactive, the last surviving vestige of American Laser Games' (*Crime Patrol*, *Mad Dog McCree*) interactive entertainment division, has been selling that very message, successfully. Having sold 1.7 million copies of the *Nancy Drew* adventure series, the company, whose wares proved so popular it began self-publishing in November 2000, found itself championing a most unexpected audience. "We've never tried to create girly games, just great ones," says CEO Megan Gaiser. "As such, it wasn't long before we discovered the people playing our titles were both men and women ages 10 to 80."

Although many gamers view HI strictly as a developer of products for a youthful, female demographic, the company's executives see the business targeting casual hobbyists as a whole.

“CROSSOVER BETWEEN MALE AND FEMALE AUDIENCES IS COMMON IN THE BOOK- AND FILM-PUBLISHING WORLDS; WHY NOT GAMING?”

—MEGAN GAISER

That girls often find themselves drawn to the firm's brands, they say, is simply a side effect of the type of titles HI constructs. “The gaming industry is in its infancy,” Gaiser stresses. “We still have a long way to go before the market is segmented completely, and in the meantime, we've carved a clean niche [that] appeals to both sexes. Crossover between male and female audiences is common in the book- and film-publishing worlds; why not gaming?”

Of course, Gaiser claims you can't discount the value of marketing specifically to women. “There need to be as many entertainment options as there are preferences for girls,” she says. “Every female is different; to think a line of *Barbie* titles alone suffices is pathetic.”

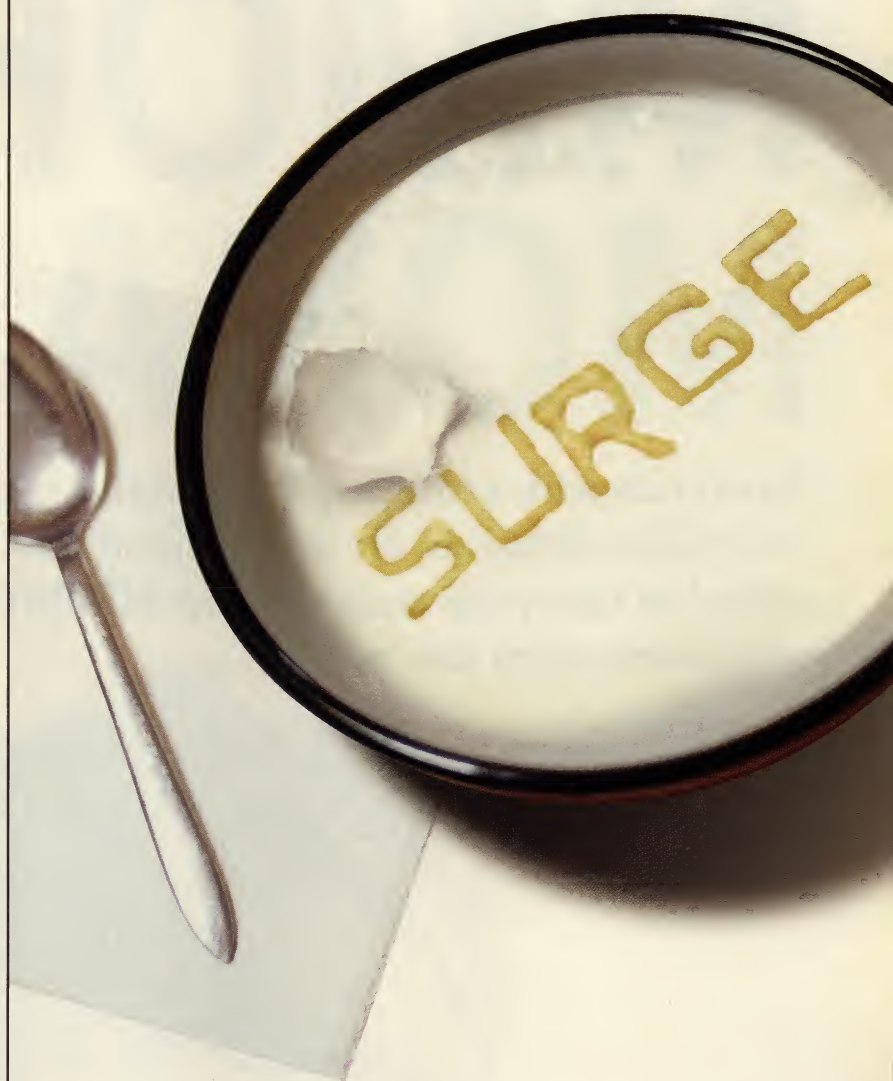
Such theories apparently have credence with some industry insiders. Riding high on distribution deals inked with Atari and The Adventure Company, Her Interactive plans to expand its product line significantly in the following months.

Laughs Gaiser, “Money talks. We've seen a huge transition in attitude amongst observers. Years ago, no one believed in us. Now that we're a success, even the skeptics are becoming believers.”

She Said, She Said

Our quartet of experts present many opinions, and one obvious conclusion: girls and games are destined for one another. Publishers, developers, and media mavens should take note—though women are largely unsung in the annals of interactive entertainment, they're rapidly becoming a gaming force too big to ignore.

Olhava says, “Females constitute roughly 50 percent of the [potential] market. It's time the game industry began speaking and marketing to them directly. Publishers can't afford to push them to the side anymore. It's high time videogames were legitimized and several archaic, misplaced stereotypes [were] finally laid to rest.” ☞



An essential part of every gamer's diet.
Available at newsstands and bookstores everywhere!

THE MMORPG MORASS

Burdened with dwindling subscriptions, scrapped titles, and enormous demands for new content, can game developers afford to carry the weight of the MMORPG world on their shoulders much longer?

by Zach Meston





Unlike many of the new titles, *EverQuest II* has the advantage of a good track record to build upon.

Over the course of 2004, half a dozen massively multiplayer online role-playing games—better known as MMORPGs—will launch. These new MMORPGs will join a virtual universe already teeming with established titles like *Star Wars Galaxies*, *Asheron's Call*, *Final Fantasy XI Online*, *Dark Age of Camelot*, and *EverQuest*. It all leads to one question: has the MMORPG market reached its apex?

Some companies seem to think so. Microsoft recently cancelled the development of its upcoming Norse-themed MMORPG *Mythica* and sold *Asheron's Call* back to the game's developer, Turbine Entertainment. Does the world's largest

software company perceive the MMORPG market as oversaturated? "We wouldn't say that it's oversaturated necessarily," says Chris Lye, Microsoft Game Studio's RPG product manager, "but the current MMORPG market is incredibly crowded and highly competitive." The 40 employees whose jobs were axed by *Mythica's* cancellation would surely agree.

In mid-February, Ubisoft pulled the plug on *Uru Live*, the MMORPG version of *Uru: Ages Beyond Myst*. Just a few weeks after pulling the plug on *Uru*, Ubisoft also ceased involvement with *The Matrix Online*, which is now being published by Warner Brothers Interactive Entertainment. On the *Uru Live* web site, developer Rand Miller (co-creator of the original *Myst*) confessed that "with all of the time, money, resources, code, people, sweat, and heart that were poured into *Uru Live*, we needed a certain amount of subscribers to pay the bills. We didn't get there. The idea of ongoing content was dramatic and forward-looking, but it required a substantial continuing effort to sustain." The existing content once meant for *Uru Live* will now be released as an offline expansion pack.

Indeed, an MMORPG's development cycle never ends, requiring an army of technicians and content creators to maintain the technical and aesthetic illusion of a living world, not to mention a considerable amount of cash to fund that army. Microsoft and Ubisoft are among a handful of publishers with the financial wherewithal to back an MMORPG for the months, and sometimes years, it can take to become profitable; the fact that both companies bailed on some highly touted titles reflects the confusion of the game industry as a whole. What was once perceived as a genre with unlimited possibilities has now become one fraught with uncertainty.

Pointing Fingers, Courting Beginners

Uru Live's former live-content director, Bill Slease, theorizes that most of the people who purchased *Uru* didn't have the broadband connection required to participate in the online component or simply weren't interested in it. Recent statistics seem to agree with Slease's former theory; while a late-2003 study by IBD/TIPP indicates that 83 million American households have at least one PC, the Internet research firm eMarketer estimates that the number of American households with broadband access will only reach 32.5 million by the end of 2004. But this pool of broadband users is already enough to have a successful online business—Microsoft is experiencing critical and commercial success with the yearly subscription-based, broadband-exclusive Xbox Live service.

Sleaze's theory that not enough gamers are interested holds considerably more weight, at least with videogame market analysts. In a company

World of Warcraft (top) has beta testers buzzing, while *Middle-Earth Online* (bottom) plans to fulfill many a geek's dream with a persistent world based on *The Lord of the Rings*.

weblog, Jupiter Research analyst Joseph Laszlo speaks of "the limited nature of the MMORPG audience....At this stage, neither tie-ins to existing brands or worlds (*Uru Live*, like *The Sims Online* and *Star Wars Galaxies*), nor 'original' games that retread the fantasy genre have any kind of guarantee of success."

David Cole, the president of the game-industry research company DFC Intelligence, stated in an online interview that he thinks "there is room for only a handful of [MMORPGs] in each genre."

In an online essay, Kevin Hannah, the chief

marketing officer of PersistentWorldz, Inc., agrees with Slease that casual gamers aren't interested. "Community is the biggest component of MMOCGs [massively multiplayer online community games, as Hannah terms *The Sims Online* and his own company's *Z-Opolis*], but if they are to be successful with casual gamers, we have to remember that they are still gamers."

The Sims Stalls

Several upcoming MMORPGs are trying to draw in the elusive casual gamer by reducing the time required to "level up" characters, so players can safely explore the game world without being offed by a garter snake. Sierra's *Middle-Earth Online* features "time-based enhancement," in which a character's stats advance, whether or not its user is online; EA's *Ultima X: Odyssey* allows characters to teleport anywhere in its world at any time and doesn't penalize players for dying.

What about hardcore MMORPG fans? Developers and publishers have discovered that most of them are unwilling to share their time and affection with multiple virtual worlds, preferring to invest themselves in a single game. Sony Online Entertainment, the developer and publisher of *EverQuest* (North America's most popular MMORPG), takes great care to refer to the upcoming *EverQuest II* as a "companion," rather than a sequel, as the II in its title implies. SOE clearly does not want to alienate its fan base by implying a mandatory upgrade.

The most dramatic example of the pitfalls of the MMORPG market continues to be provided by *The Sims Online*. Based on the best-selling PC game of all time and backed by the marketing dollars of the industry's largest videogame publisher, *TSO* should have been an enormous success. EA itself predicted 400,000 subscribers by the end of 2003. In its first month, *TSO* quickly gained 100,000 subscribers. One year later, *TSO* has yet to grow beyond that mark, and the number of subscribers has actually dropped to 80,000. Analysts estimated that EA needed to achieve 350,000 subscribers within a few months of launch in order to turn a profit.

PersistentWorldz's Hannah points out that whether it was an assumption or a hope, converting large numbers of existing *Sims* players to *TSO* never materialized. "I think the leap to interacting with real people as part of the gameplay experience was just too much of a hurdle," he says, "especially when *TSO* is all about interacting with other people."

TSO suffers from the ongoing problem of a hostile environment, which has generated a steady stream of bad press. "The in-game interaction is very adult," says Hannah, "with no compulsory chat filtering, and griefers [people who thrive on ruining the game for legitimate players] abound." A July 2003 article from the Associated Press referred to *TSO* as "a Petri dish of anti-social behavior."

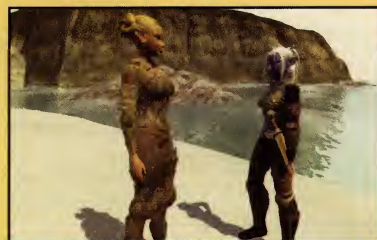


THE VIRTUAL WORLDS OF 2004

Publisher
Sony Online Entertainment
Developer
Sony Online Entertainment
Release Date
Fall/Winter

EverQuest II

While the lead designers of the original *EverQuest* departed SOE a while back to form Sigil Games, *EverQuest II* has "a number of key original team members" and doesn't intend to stray far from the core gameplay of the original. SOE has been understandably coy about discussing *EQII*'s changes and additions, but several juicy details have leaked out via public demos and developer Q&A sessions. The most drastic change: the quest system has been revamped so that most goals can be completed in a few hours, an attempt to attract and hold on to casual gamers.



Publisher
Vivendi Universal
Developer
Turbine Entertainment
Release Date
Fall/Winter

Middle-Earth Online

At about the same time that Electronic Arts purchased the rights to produce games based on New Line's *The Lord of the Rings* movie trilogy, Vivendi Universal picked up the rights to produce games based on the literary works of J.R.R. Tolkien. With *Middle-Earth Online*, VU Games collaborates with Turbine Entertainment, the creators of *Asheron's Call*. The most intriguing feature of *Middle-Earth Online* is "time-based advancement," in which character stats advance whether or not you're playing online. While you won't get to meet the Fellowship of the Ring, the game's expansion packs—yes, they're already talking expansions before the game has shipped—will roughly follow the path of the book trilogy.



Publisher
Warner Brothers Interactive Entertainment
Developer
Monolith
Release Date
Fall/Winter

The Matrix Online

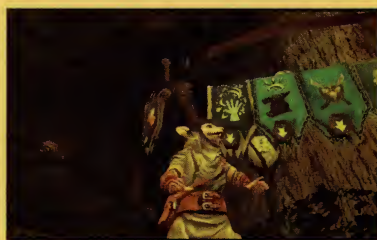
Warner Brothers Interactive Entertainment is pressing ahead with its plans for *The Matrix Online*, being jointly developed by Monolith (they of *No One Lives Forever* and *TRON 2.0*) and the Wachowski brothers, who wrote and directed the video sequences in the best-selling *Enter the Matrix* game. *The Matrix Online* is set after the events of the movie trilogy, with a tenuous peace treaty in place between the humans and the Machines. The gameplay emphasizes wire-fu and bullet time combat, although there's a storyline of sorts, apparently advanced by monthly cinematic scenes.



Publisher
EA Games
Developer
Origin
Release Date
Fall/Winter

Ultima X: Odyssey

Ultima Online was the first game in the series that didn't involve Richard "Lord British" Garriott, the father of the series (who left Electronic Arts for NCsoft), but that didn't keep it from being successful. *Odyssey* continues down this path, using the Unreal graphics engine primarily intended for first-person shooters. *Odyssey*'s combat system enables the player to directly control every action; "stun" spells don't exist, and monsters use genuine AI. *Odyssey* incorporates the system of virtues that made the early *Ultima* titles so intriguing, monitoring your actions and affecting the evolution of your character accordingly.

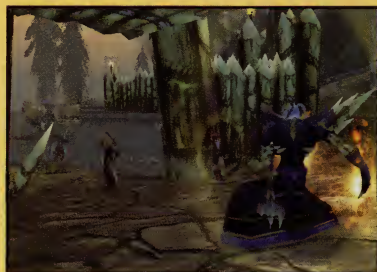


Publisher
Blizzard
Developer
Blizzard
Release Date
Winter

World of Warcraft

Blizzard is the can't-miss developer and publisher behind *StarCraft*, *Diablo*, and *Warcraft*, three of the most popular game franchises of the past decade; it's the detailed game-world of the latter series that Blizzard has chosen as the setting for its first MMORPG, *World of Warcraft*.

As with most of the other MMORPGs on the way in 2004, *WOW* promises to reduce dreaded downtime in a host of ways, like two-hour quests and fast-paced combat against multiple opponents. *WOW* will feature a handful of Blizzard's famously detailed cinematic sequences (because gamers are such graphics whores).



In December 2003, EA terminated the *TSO* account of Peter Ludlow, the author of a *TSO* blog that documented such unseemly aspects of the game as a cyber-brothel being run by a teenage male posing as a woman. EA's drastic action resulted in another wave of negative publicity, including a piece in *The New York Times* on "A Real-Life Debate on Free Expression in a Cyberspace City."

Survival of the Fittest

TSO is hardly the only MMORPG to experience rapid growth followed by prolonged stagnation; virtually every MMORPG released since *Ultima Online* in late 1997 has followed the same pattern. *EverQuest* achieved

Not many know what to expect from *Ultima X: Odyssey* (top) or *The Matrix Online* (bottom).



SUBSCRIPTION STATS

MMORPG subscription stats come directly from game publishers and are inherently unverifiable, but here are recent numbers, as culled from press releases and online estimates. Take them all with a grain of salt.

Asheron's Call	80,000*	
Dark Age of Camelot	225,000	
EverQuest	420,000	
Final Fantasy XI Online	500,000**	
PlanetSide	50,000	
The Sims Online	80,000	
Star Wars Galaxies	470,000	
Ultima Online	250,000	

*Turbine and Microsoft haven't shared their subscription figures; one Internet expert believes this to be a rough figure.

**This is a worldwide figure that includes Japan and North America.

200,000 subscribers in its first year, and 400,000 subscribers by the end of 2001, but has vacillated between 400,000 and 450,000 subscribers ever since. (*Ultima Online* has averaged between 200,000 and 250,000 subscribers for the same length of time.)

Not even the regular release of expansion packs helps to stem the slowdown. While the expansions give MMORPGs a continued and vital presence at retail, they don't bring an influx of new subscribers; instead, they merely pacify the current subscribers, whose hunger for new content is insatiable.

With the increased number of MMORPGs competing for attention, the period of rapid growth following each launch has shortened; the user population of *Asheron's Call* peaked roughly a year after release, as did that of *Dark Age of Camelot*. Fantasy-themed MMORPGs are now literally stealing virtual citizens away from each other, competing to be the most entertaining cyberspace in which to "live."

It's not all gloom and doom for the genre, however. *Final Fantasy XI Online*, the first MMORPG from Japanese developer and RPG publisher Square Enix, has pulled in more than 500,000 subscribers since its mid-2002 launch. *FFXI* is primed to receive a considerable population boost with the release of the PlayStation 2 version. Despite its ongoing technical issues, *Star Wars Galaxies* topped 450,000 subscribers.

It's a plain fact that some of this year's pending MMORPGs won't survive far beyond their launches, but the game developers that haven't abandoned it believe the genre will survive and continue to evolve. "The future does not look as promising as it did," says Hannah, "but who knows what I'll see this year that may change my view. I can only hope, and I can only try." ☺

PRESENTING A BETTER WAY TO FR4G

**GO FROM A 17" MONITOR TO A 200" SCREEN
WITH A BOXLIGHT PROJECTOR!**

Wanna be 1337? Then play your games the size they were meant to be played on.

Jump head-first into your games at larger than life size. Multiple connections can handle any platform you bring our way. So whether it's on a PC or a console, we've got you covered. BOXLIGHT also comes with the only FREE 24/7 telephone tech support in the industry. So if you're up at 3AM having trouble, you can give us a call and we'll trouble-shoot with you over the phone.

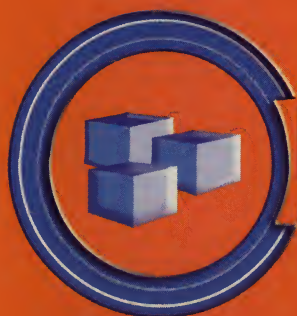
As the "First Name in Digital Projectors" we can't think of any other projector that you would rather FR4G on.

CD-726c



• 2500 ANSI LUMENS • XGA RESOLUTION • 1800:1 CONTRAST RATIO

FROM \$999 AND UP!



BOXLIGHT

PRESENTING A BETTER WAY TO FRAG

WWW.BOXLIGHT.COM/GAMING

1.888.739.0774

© 2004. BOXLIGHT and the BOXLIGHT logo are registered trademarks of BOXLIGHT Corporation.

SPRING FLINGS,

SUMMER

HEAT



**Judge the console pennant
race with this cheat sheet
guide to who's hot, who's
not, and who's struck out.**

by Russ Fischer

All-Star Baseball 2005

SCORE



Acclaim's been winding down since it's N64 heyday, but this year's *ASB* boasts a new Fielder Cam and a solid pitching/batting duo, two innovations that definitely work in its favor. The former is a third-person cam that ditches the typical top-down fielding view. Instead, it favors a lens that would look at home behind Lara Croft; now it trails Johnny Damon. The Fielder Cam works well most of the time and is a great new perspective on the game. Look for it to show up in EA's game next year.

Meanwhile, *ASB* continues its strong pitching/batting combo. The broadcast camera views the pitching from behind the mound instead of from the plate, which is a blessing. Pitches look good (except for the knuckleball) and AI batting will send a realistic percentage into grounders and fouls.

The Nintendo 64 roots are buried pretty deep, and the heavily aliased player models must have been ported from 1999. Stadiums fare better, but the animated audience textures go from effective to comical faster than Martha Stewart sells stock. A polyphonic spree of play modes can't counter the feeling that *ASB* is behind the times, even with the flashy new camera.

Publisher Acclaim **Developer** Acclaim
ESRB E **Format** PS2, Xbox **Online?** Yes



TRADE OFFERS

ATLANTA BRAVES

PLAYER
JOHNNY ESTRADA
JORGE VELANDIA
JULIO ESCOBAR
JULIO FRANCO
JUNG BONG

PLAYER
 GARRET ANDERSON
 BARTOLO COLON
 JEFF DAVANON
 DAVID ECKSTEIN
 DARIN FRSTAD
 4 IN

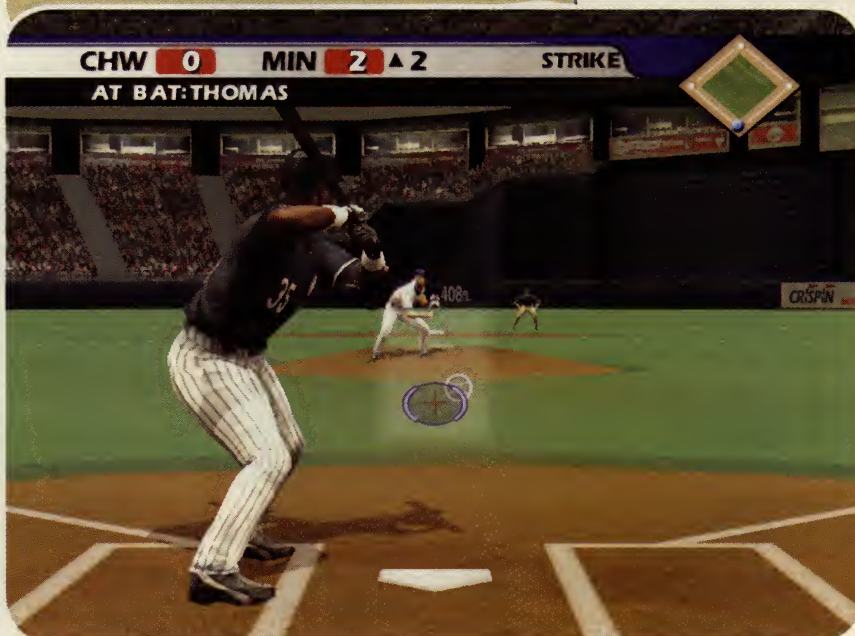
Outer Sheet

ATLANTA BRAVES

POS

OFFER SUBMIT OFFER

ANALYSIS



Roster Analysis

ATLANTA BRAVES ACTIVE ROSTER

CF

LF ANDREW JONES B+ RF J.D. DREW B-

CHIPPER JONES B GARY MATTHEWS JR. C+ J.D. DREW B-

GARY MATTHEWS JR. C+ GARY MATTHEWS JR. C-

NEEDS \$5 2B NEEDS

RAFAEL FURCAL B MARCUS GILES B

JESSE GARCIA C JESSE GARCIA C

3B 1B

MARK DEROZA C+ JULIO FRANCO C

RUSSELL BRANTYAN C RUSSELL BRANTYAN C

C

EDDIE PEREZ C-

ELI MARRERO C+

JOHNNY ESTRADA C

LEVEL

HELP

MLB 2005



SCORE



Last year, 989's efforts were barely fit to sweep up in the dugout, which makes the truly pleasing *MLB*

2005 a big surprise. The animation issues are gone, and while AI tics still leave the occasional catcher circling the plate like a light-drunk moth, this is a smart, sharply animated bunch of ball players. Pitching and batting are well-tuned, with hot and cold zones for hurlers and three levels of difficulty at the plate. Home runs no longer predominate, which provides more realistic ERAs and contact spreads. *MLB*'s ball physics, a feature too often overlooked, are impeccable.



The Franchise mode is for hardcore fantasy players only, with unplayable graphic representations of games, and a focus on wrangling finances instead of fouls. The Career mode, which uses a huge set of challenges to move from spring training to Cooperstown, boasts EyeToy integration; use Sony's glam cam to throw your own mug on a player model. This time, it's personal.

Presentation is behind the curve, and baserunning and pitcher fatigue need more work. In general, there's nothing in this title that hasn't been done elsewhere, but to our great surprise, *MLB 2005* feels the most satisfying of any of the titles here. Suited for dilettantes and diehards alike, it packs solid core play and stellar online features.

Publisher SCEA **Developer** 989 Sports
ESRB E **Format** PS2 **Online?** Yes



MVP Baseball 2004

SCORE



EA's all-star certainly provides the most polished ride to the ball game, with slick PIP baserunning, well-implemented pitcher fatigue, and swing replays that educate and ridicule at the same time. Player models and animations are second to none. EA's patented right stick control provides great slides and convincing leaping and diving catches. On the other hand, *MVP's* stadiums are flatter than 3DO's revenue curve. It boldly stands out against the otherwise infallible presentation.

The 125-game Dynasty mode presents the deepest franchise experience in digital ball, but the inclusion of fully licensed minor leagues is *MVP's* trump card. Team management reaches new heights (or depths) with a system that registers player emotions. That Jose Canseco simulator is finally good to go.

Bells and whistles aside, the actual game feels too arcade, and even slipshod at points. The metered system compromises throwing and belongs in the PGA, not the ALCS. Fast, accurate plays are the exception, not the rule, because the meter makes you wait so long while it fills.

Better-tuned baserunning could have helped, but that'll be a bullet point on next year's feature list. *MVP's* flash will wow the curious and easily satisfied, but the hardcore should beware its crucial performance lags and set their sights on other clubs.

Publisher EA Sports **Developer** EA Sports **ESRB** E **Format** GC, PC, PS2, Xbox **Online?** Yes (PS2 only).

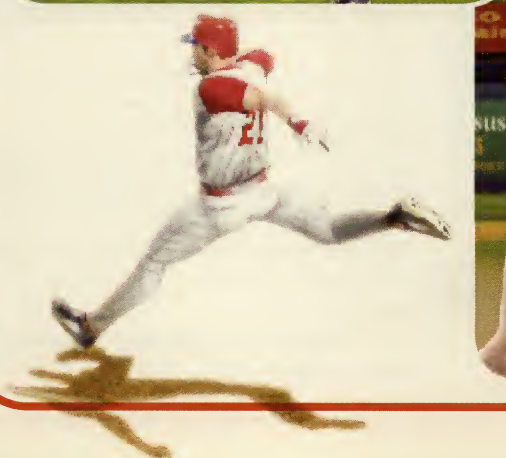
EA's all-star certainly provides the most polished ride to the ball game, with slick PIP baserunning,



2004
KING
OF THE
DIAMOND
SURGE



325



Call Ups/Send Downs NYY

SS E. Almonte	47	NYY MLB R
THROWS: Right		
BATS: Right		
2ND Pos: NONE		
AGE: 26		
HEIGHT: 6'2"		
WEIGHT: 180		

CF K. LOFTON

AVG	.296
RBI	46
HR	12

BATTING STATS

	R
AVG	.260
HR	1
RBI	11
RUNS	17
SB	1
HITS	26
OBP	.321
SLUG%	.350

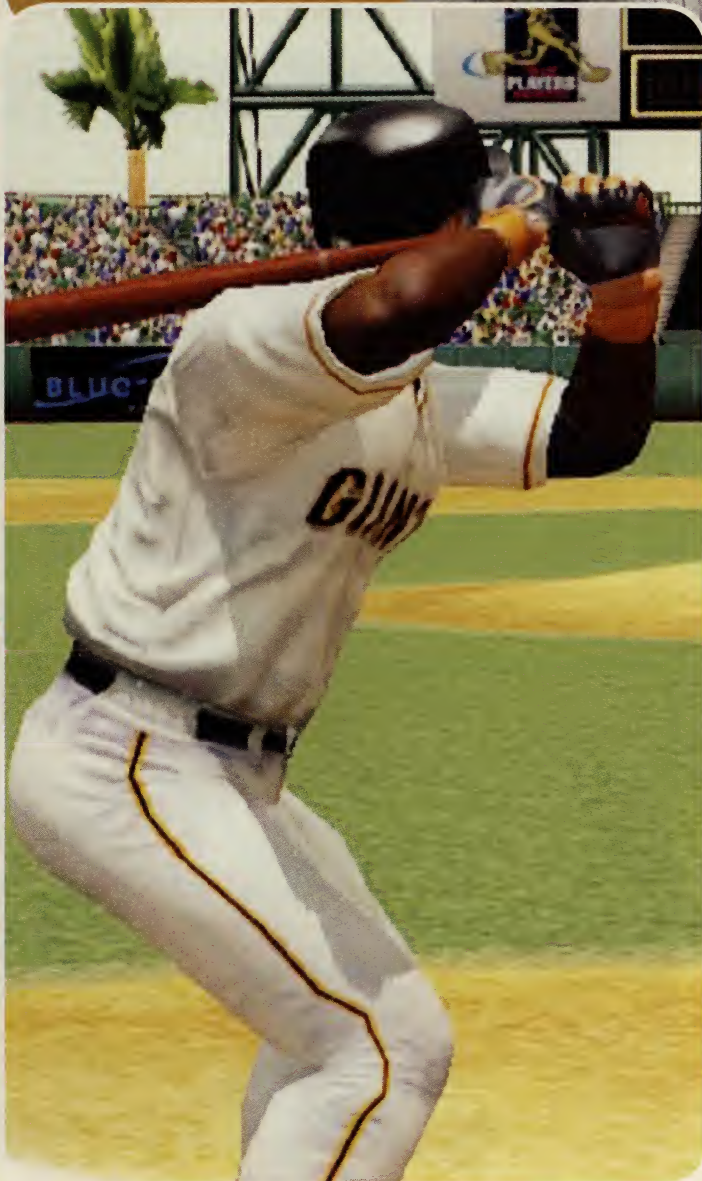
POS PLAYER OVERALL

POS	PLAYER	OVERALL
C	J. POSADA	
SP	J. CONTRERAS	
LF	H. MATSUI	
CF	B. WILLIAMS	
3B	A. BOONE	
SP	J. LIEBER	
CF	K. LOFTON	

BACK **HIDE INFO**



ESPN Major League Baseball 2004



SCORE

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	100
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	-----

Aficionados generally consider *World Series Baseball 2K3* to be the cream of the

crop, but this iteration doesn't deliver the same juice. The name switch accompanies a few enhancements, like the first-person play seen in *ESPN NFL Football 2004*. (It's more of a novelty than *ASB's* Fielder Cam.) The player-confidence meter, which tracks performance highs and lows and can create nice clutch plays, is a great touch.

ESPN tweaks the Franchise mode, adding owner personalities (dictator, lifelong fan, etc.) and franchise goals. The 30-Year mode hosts a fraction of *MVP's* dynasty, yet it's not as daunting and is somewhat more intense. As in the franchise modes from 989 and *Acclaim*, this title's mode simulates games, though in a full-on broadcast interface. Intrusive gamers can jump into the *Sims*-ed game at any time.

Visually, ESPN dazzles with a revamped engine, better player faces, and some nice stadiums. Suffering from letdowns like a dodgy pitching interface and less than stellar physics, it generally feels like a franchise on cruise control. It's tough to decide if ESPN has fallen behind or if others have caught up, but the result is the same: respectable ball on the verge of becoming the Cubs of console baseball.

Publisher Sega **Developer** Blue Shift **ESRB** E **Format** PS2, Xbox Online? Yes

MLB Slugfest: Loaded



SCORE



The black sheep of console beanball returns, flames and bruises intact. Playing the

Slugfest series, with its heavy arcade sensibility, has always been comparable to watching the XFL when you really want to be at the Super Bowl. The over-the-top play is a good lark, especially when it comes to enacting that nonexistent cross-Florida rivalry. Others have successfully implemented the intentional bean and bench-clearing brawls, which puts *Slugfest* at a disadvantage.

As a response, Midway courts serious players with this implementation. It's possible to turn off the flaming superpitches and punching bag base runners, leaving a simple game of baseball. That's the easy way to notice the revamped, more powerful pitching interface and the inarguably deep and detail-oriented Baseball Mogul engine. Instead of simply swinging for the fences with a Home Run Derby approach, this mix of hardcore and stupidcore feels unfocused, like a hitter swinging outside the strike zone.

Along with everyone else, Midway has gone online this year. When connected via Xbox Live, a scrolling real-life MLB.com update bar appears—a nice touch. PS2 ballers get their own instant tournament system in the vein of *NFL Blitz*. It won't last until October, but the fast, furious play is decent summer fun.

Publisher Midway Sports **Developer** Midway Sports **ESRB** E **Format** PS2, Xbox **Online?** Yes

TRIAL BY FIRE



**The Torture Test
admits ten controllers.
Not one emerges
unscathed.**

by Scott Steinberg and Russ Fischer



Pets, power failures, pitches at the wall—it's amazing the hazards gamepads face. To survive, durability is of the utmost importance. *SURGE* put ten leading contenders through their paces in hopes of determining the most damage resistant. Warning: Do not try this at home. We did, and the stench still lingers.

WAVEBIRD WIRELESS



FROM: Nintendo
FOR: GameCube
\$34.95



BEATING (Food/Drink/General Abuse)

Despite being knocked around the coffee table, doused in soda, and served with a side of pepperoni, the unit kept on ticking.



BURNING (Grill)

"Fire, walk with me," said the little controller that could, as it artfully resisted 20 seconds of roasting, sunny-side up.



LEAP OF FAITH (Drop Off Building)

Although it plummeted from a four-story parking deck, this free bird instantly soared past the competition by remaining functional following its impromptu crash landing.



VERDICT: ★★★★★

Designed for use by toddlers. We almost dare say this device could survive a direct hit from a cruise missile.

DUALSHOCK 2



FROM: SCEA
FOR: PlayStation 2
\$24.99



Neither being physically abused, forcibly smothered in pizza sauce, nor submersed in Sprite dulled its sticky, but stalwart, countenance. Delicious!



After a short period on the grill, this one emerged looking limper than a man who awakes sober next to Tipper Gore.



Scuffed, cracked, and broken, it wasn't much use as a videogame interface, but nevertheless made a fine makeshift morning star.



VERDICT: ★★★★★

Small and hardy, the unit resists everyday wear and tear, but caves under intense pressure, like getting kicked around a parking lot.

PHOENIX PAD



FROM: Radica/Gamester
FOR: PlayStation 2
\$14.99



BEATING Congealed goo in the joystick and directional-pad wells resulted in system malfunction, even before the pad doubled as a Hacky Sack.



BURNING Talk about misleading names. Rather than rise from the ashes, this Phoenix hunkered down beneath them, wilting into the raging conflagration.



LEAP OF FAITH Its buttons and analog controls shattered following its suicide attempt, Radica's pride and joy was a useful paperweight and nothing more.



VERDICT: ★★☆☆☆☆

Barely capable of withstanding even a weakling gamer's embrace, we'd fling this lemon into the bushes, but the squirrels would throw it right back.

PREDATOR WIRELESS



FROM: Pelican
FOR: PlayStation 2
\$39.99



BEATING Like a certain extraterrestrial killer, this aptly titled gamepad proved incredibly resistant to scratching, tearing, stopping, and being served with a side of chips.



BURNING Scorching heat tarnished its good looks, but couldn't completely rob the peripheral of its functionality. That was the next test's job.



LEAP OF FAITH Who'd have guessed? Lose a few parts by leaping face-first onto the pavement, and suddenly command detection doesn't function so well.



VERDICT: ★★★★★★

A fairly stalwart option, albeit one that's ultimately sensitive to rampant manhandling. Don't let it anywhere near your kid brother.

CORDLESS CONTROLLER



FROM: Logitech
FOR: Xbox
\$69.95



BEATING Juggling, kicking, and even hosing the most expensive contender down with cola backwash proved ineffectual; no matter the punishment, it kept on ticking.



BURNING Apart from minor cosmetic flaws, we found the gadget impressively suffered almost no damage during our attempted cremation.



LEAP OF FAITH Cracked case notwithstanding, the only scars this one seemingly suffered following its leap of faith were of the mental variety.



VERDICT: ★★★★★

Tough as nails (though a bit spotty performance-wise after its trials), the Logitech cordless controller enthusiastically earns its keep.

GAMECUBE CONTROLLER



FROM: Nintendo
FOR: GameCube
\$24.95



BEATING Having survived many a kindergartener's lethal grip, the pad practically laughed at our best efforts to undermine it with gnawed crust.



BURNING Licking flames did a number on the controller's outer shell, but internally, all components functioned perfectly, like Jason from *Friday the 13th*.



LEAP OF FAITH Yeah, right. Like a 50-foot drop could phase a unit that frequently doubles as a chew toy for teething puppies.



VERDICT: ★★★★★

The GameCube may be geared toward kids, but these controllers are tough enough to withstand a nuclear meltdown.

MICROCON



FROM: Mad Catz
FOR: PlayStation 2
\$14.99



BEATING Neither piping-hot meat by-products nor a quick clog dance in steel-toed boots could inflict lasting damage upon this pad.



BURNING If you can't take the heat, stay off the grill. The MicroCon didn't, and functionality suffered for its folly.



LEAP OF FAITH Adios, amigo—all it took was one sound toss. The power cable, plus several buttons, separated completely from the controller.



VERDICT: ★★★★★

Occasional spills and the odd tumble won't slow its roll, but anything more forceful than a slap on the wrist will send this baby running to its mommy.

TRICK CONTROLLER



FROM: Pelican
FOR: Xbox
\$24.99



BEATING Crusty, icky, and covered in crumbs, this Trick Daddy didn't flinch when diving into a wading pool of Dr. Pepper.



BURNING The Pelican's fireproof consistency served it well. It comfortably reclined as flames danced all around.



LEAP OF FAITH Let's hope Pelican's protégé left a will behind. A single heft sundered the system into pieces.



VERDICT: ★★★★★

If you can manage to not fling your Trick off a freestanding structure, it should make a fine gaming companion.

EXTREME ACTION CONTROLLER



FROM: Logitech
FOR: PlayStation 2
\$24.99



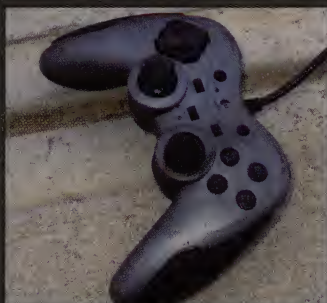
BEATING Excessive spillage was our chosen method of mayhem. Utter obliviousness was the peripheral's response. Touché, Logitech, touché.



BURNING Call the trauma unit; we have a burn victim! Nonetheless, a disgustingly ravaged exterior protected its internal parts completely.



LEAP OF FAITH Bruised and battered, the gadget resolutely soldiered on, pretty much operating at peak levels after going skydiving without a parachute.



VERDICT: ★★★★★

All the money Logitech rakes in on cordless pads has to go somewhere. Our guess: making standard-issue controllers from titanium.

XBOX CONTROLLER



FROM: Microsoft
FOR: Xbox
\$29.99



BEATING Shoving chips and pizza toppings into the memory card slot? Classic. Trying to get the memory card to work afterward? Just plain dumb.



BURNING As thick as the girls in *OutKast* videos, this beefy standby barely batted an eyelash at the charcoal smoldering below.



LEAP OF FAITH One bent analog stick, countless scratches, and some trendy concrete scuffs couldn't stop us from enjoying a game of *Crimson Skies*.



VERDICT: ★★★★★

Avoid deliberately messing with the pieces that contain sensitive circuitry, and it'll serve you well, even after bouncing it off a buddy's head.

Armies of Exigo

Real troll strategy

Publisher
EA Games

Developer
Black Hole Games

Genre
RTS

Release Date
Fall

PC



The gaming industry makes as much money as the old Hollywood studios, perhaps more. So what does the established producer of the *Rambo* film series and *T3* do to profit from this trend? He, as in Andrew Vajna, joins the gaming world with his Black Hole Games studio and the RTS, *Armies of Exigo*.

Slated for a fall release from EA, *Armies of Exigo* is set in a fantasy world above and below ground.

You control three groups, in stages. The groups vary from knights and wizards to ogres and trolls to dark elves and weird creatures (it has a hint of Vivendi's *War of the Ring*). You can battle in single-player and multiplayer modes, tunneling through the underground and surprising your enemy above you. The maps will be huge, so don't expect a fly-by-night experience.

—Les Shu

GoldenEye 2

A villainous proposition

Publisher
EA Games

Developer
EA LA

Genre
Action

Release Date
Fall

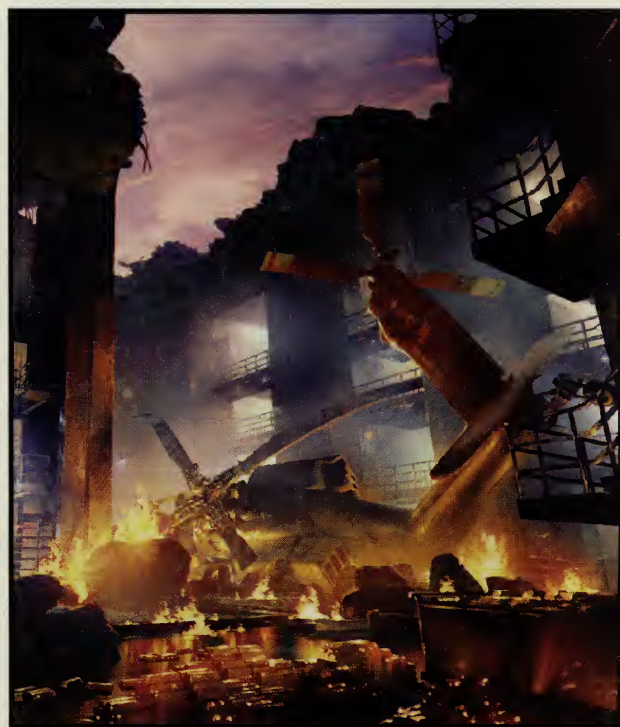
GC | PS2 | Xbox

On the heels of the critically acclaimed *Everything or Nothing*, EA has announced it will release a follow-up to what is arguably the best Bond game ever, *GoldenEye*, for the N64. If *Everything or Nothing* is any indication, the Bond games could do for the series what the modern movies couldn't: provide an entertaining visual feast.

If you're tired of Pierce Brosnan's mug, you'll be glad to hear he isn't the star this time around. Developed by EA LA, *GoldenEye 2* (a working title, by the way) places you in the shoes of a villain, a former reckless MI6 agent who teams up with supernemesis Auric Goldfinger's organization (cue Shirley Bassey).

The game is due for a fall release on several consoles. The ability to play on the opposite side opens a new world in the series (as opposed to Bond fights the bad guy, Bond saves the world, Bond gets the girl), but, as with the movies, it could be a hit or miss.

—LS



Astro Boy

He's big in Japan

Publisher

Sega

Developer

Sonic Team

Genre

Action

Release Date

Summer

PS2

Sure, he looks like Mickey Mouse fresh off an appearance on *Extreme Makeover*, and his jet-black codpiece doesn't leave much to the imagination, but Astro Boy is Japan's most enduring cartoon icon. In an effort to introduce him to a larger North American audience, Sega has designed a fun game that maintains the authenticity of the robot boy with a heart of gold (and aluminum and plastics).

With a variety of tools, including his trusty rocket boots, arm canon, and X-ray vision, Astro hops, skips, and jumps around Metro City in his slightly pansy-esque efforts to defeat enemies like Magnamite, Acheron, and the Blue Knight. The character is a little too Care Bears meets ET, but the game offers immersive, nonlinear levels and a decent variety of puzzles and unlockables. If you can get over the Japanime camp, you'll appreciate a multifaceted action game that appears to have plenty to offer.

—Tal Pinchevsky



Battlefield 2

Rumsfeld's wet dream

Publisher

EA

Developer

Digital Illusions CE

Genre

Action

Release Date

Spring 2005

PC

While the upcoming *Battlefield: Modern Combat* is expected to break serious multiplayer ground on consoles, the PC-based complement, *Battlefield 2*, as the name implies, is the official sequel. Armed with a new gaming engine, *Battlefield 2* brings modern combat into the gaming fray of the popular EA series, which has already immortalized Vietnam and World War II-based multiplayer.

Commander mode brings a fresh approach to the



gameplay, allowing squad commanders to direct their boys from a top-down view, making for the ultimate chess match. Players form alliances among three separate coalitions, and the game remains essentially team-based, which should keep the gameplay intense. Expect a new scalable map that changes size according to the number of players, as well as considerably improved graphics and audio. *Battlefield 2* appears to have just as much action as its predecessors, if not more.

—TP

Battlefield: Modern Combat

PS2 online just got bigger and better

Publisher
EA

Developer
Digital Illusions CE

Genre
FPS

Release Date
Fall

PS2



You know that thing war vets say about putting your hand in what used to be your friend's face? We'll assume that it's true. If there is one thing that EA's *Battlefield* series has impressed upon us, it is that war is unrelentingly brutal.

With its introduction to the PS2, *Battlefield: Modern Combat* becomes the first console installment in the series. While previous titles dealt with historic battles and wars, *Modern Combat* drops you into the high-tech

world of contemporary battles. That means more than 30 vehicles and 70 state-of-the-art weapons in some of the world's most contested hot spots. Online battles will allow up to 24 participants, and you'll be able to gain and eventually pull rank, fighting for the US, China, or a new fictitious Middle East Coalition. Voiceover communication, for barking orders at your useless cavalry of maggots, is supported by USB headsets. Get ready for hell, soldier, the fun kind.

—TP

Call of Duty: United Offensive

World War II, the sequel

Publisher
Activision

Developer
Gray Matter Interactive

Genre
FPS

Release Date
Fall

PC

The snowball effect surrounding *Call of Duty* refuses to melt. In light of the awesome critical and commercial success of the World War II action/shooter monster, Activision is working on the expansion pack, entitled *Call of Duty: United Offensive*.

The expansion pack includes three all-new single-player campaigns, based around some of history's fiercest battles, including the Battle of the Bulge, the Battle of Kursk, and the Allied invasion of Sicily. New character abilities, new weapons, and three new multiplayer modes (Tank Battle, Capture the Flag, and Domination) help keep *CoD* fresh for all the fledgling gamers who secretly wish they had been born into Tom Brokaw's "greatest generation."

As if *Call of Duty* didn't seem big enough in terms of levels and environments, *United Offensive's* ten new single player maps make the game bigger and—for all you gamers who happen to be war buffs—more historically accurate.

—TP



NBA Live 2005

Throw it down—or tip it in

Publisher
EA Sports

Developer
EA Sports

Genre
Sports

Release Date
Fall

GC | PC | PS2 | Xbox

As any NBA coach or player will tell you, the game is often won in the paint. With *NBA Live 2005*'s Freestyle Air feature, players will have more power than ever before under the rim, with the ability to attempt tip-ins, put-backs, and rebounds at the touch of a button. Guard-happy gamers beware: with nothing left to chance on the block, Kevin Garnett's level of play just got more dominant.

As always, EA will continue its quest for perfection with the graphic presentation. *NBA Live 2005* will feature sharper and more realistic player models, which duplicate the stars right down to the shoes they wear.

—Matt Bertz



Madden NFL 2005

Defense wins championships

Publisher
EA Sports

Developer
Tiburon

Genre
Sports

Release Date
August

GC | PC | PS2 | Xbox



Though the *Madden* football franchise has always produced scorefests, it is widely maintained that defense wins championships on the gridiron. To reflect this reality, EA is fine-tuning the finest football franchise known to man. In *Madden NFL 2005*, EA puts its emphasis on new defensive tools to keep your opposition under wraps.

The "Hit Stick" control dedicates the right analog stick to tackling, which should sharpen those goal line stands and result in fewer ill-timed dives past the runner. Now, all EA needs to adopt is a better defensive AI scheme. For the last time, NO defensive coordinator would try to cover Randy Moss with a linebacker if he's lined up in the slot... —MB

The Dukes of Hazzard: Return of the General Lee

Like a slow-motion stunt jump over a ravine

Publisher
Ubisoft

Developer
Ratbag Games

Genre
Driving Adventure

Release Date
September

PS2 | Xbox



It would seem that *The Dukes of Hazzard*, the early-1980s TV show, had all the ingredients for a popular game: cars, action, a loyal fan following, a good theme song, and an attractive female supporting character who spawned her own line of hot pants. So why aren't the Dukes videogame icons yet?

Australian developer Ratbag gets a chance to change that with this fall's driving adventure *The Dukes of Hazzard: Return of the General Lee*. The developer's heavy racing-title résumé bodes well. Even more encouraging is the fact that Ratbag did not work on the 2001 title, the porno-sounding *The Dukes of Hazzard II: Daisy Dukes It Out*, a bona fide videogame limbo stick that challenged reviewers to go as low as they could go. There are superficial similarities between that title and the new one: both games feature more than 15 stunt-filled, driving-based missions; both boast voice talent by most of the show's original actors (John Schneider, Tom

Wopat, Catherine Bach, etc.), and both include the famous Waylon Jennings theme song.

New *Dukes* publisher Ubisoft promises good things for players' 2004 spin in the General Lee; the focus is on the ability to "drive anywhere and do anything in your own virtual Hazzard County." Gamers will be able to burn rubber in the General Lee, Daisy's Roadrunner, Boss Hogg's limousine, and other vehicles. (Early reports indicate on-foot action is a possibility.) A two-player, split-screen mode will feature racing, police chases, and a destruction derby.

As long as the developers remember that Bo and Luke enter the General Lee through its open windows and that Daisy's shorts are supposed to be shorter than short, the game's pedigree will be legit. Will the beloved TV franchise finally make for a good (ol') videogame? Gamers will find out in late September.

—Stephen Totilo

Final Fantasy XII

More final-er than ever

Publisher
Square Enix

Developer
Square Enix

Genre
RPG

Release Date
2005

PS2

After a landmark year that included the first true *Final Fantasy* sequel and a wildly successful MMORPG, Square revisits its tradition of creating stories unique to the franchise with *Final Fantasy XII*.

This new tale unfolds in the world of Ivalice, a Mediterranean-flavored land made famous in the *Final Fantasy Tactics* series, in a time before humans ran the show. The peaceful kingdom of Dalmasca erupts when the Arcadian Empire kills the Dalmascan king during a hostile takeover. Princess Ashe, the sole surviving heir, must join the revolt to restore her kingdom's freedom and defeat the Arcadian occupiers. During her quest, she meets the young Vaan, whose parents also died during the Empire's invasion. Together, they set out to change Ivalice for the better.

Unlike many of the other *FF* quests, *FFXII* opens up the storyline for a much less linear experience. The game will place a heavy emphasis on airship travel. Some of the ships will be strictly for transportation, but expect some battleships, as well.

As for the graphics, Square Enix delivers nothing but the best. The game's mastermind, Yasumi Matsuno (of

FF Tactics fame), is implementing a brand new engine that will use half as many polygons as *Final Fantasy X*, but will feature much better texturing and lighting effects.

This preview is just a nasty tease, though, as the game won't see shelves until 2005. —MB



Rome: Total War

The new RTS standard?

Publisher
Activision

Developer
The Creative Assembly

Genre
RTS

Release Date
Fall

PC



In the latest real-time strategy series, *Rome: Total War* offers you a chance to prove that, in another time, in another land, you would have been the great leader of men, a true follower of Augustus, not just a check-bouncing philosophy major in poorly laundered threads. With a new gaming engine that makes the cinematic battles truly epic, *Total War* will whisk you away to ancient history's greatest battles, where you'll command your armies to victory against the likes of Julius Caesar, Hannibal, and Spartacus. What it all really means is that you can flex some combat muscle by using your brain for a change.

In *TW*, you will summon the awesome powers of Greek, Roman, and Egyptian armies to crush your enemies, a familiar scenario to fans of the series. Unlike previous installments, battle scenes have a more cinematic aesthetic, and the tools of war at your disposal are more abundant. From siege towers to battering rams to assault ladders, you'll have a number of ways to destroy the infidels. But, as in real life, there is no substitute for strong soldiers. With a number of different specialized units, you will have to be a tremendous tactician in your plans of attack. Think of it as a good game of chess, only much bloodier.

Rome: Total War's true cachet lies in its latest



addition, the new online multiplayer modes, where you'll be able to match military wits with up to seven other combatants over a LAN and the Internet. If your fellow Total Warriors get tired of you flapping your jaws about the spectacular might of your forces, just challenge them online and show them yourself. After that, they will bow down before you, like the sniveling, weak blasphemers they truly are. It just makes us want to hit someone with a thigh bone. —TP

God of War

Feel the wrath

Publisher
SCEA

Developer
SCEA

Genre
Action

Release Date
Early 2005

PS2

Sony's latest action-adventure title, *God of War*, uses Greek mythology as its framework, a largely unexplored gaming backdrop (unless you think *Altered Beast* is somehow based on ancient polytheism). While this game isn't anything that Homer (the writer, not the Simpson) would have portrayed, it explores ancient Greek landscapes, embodying the spirit of Ares, son of Zeus and Hera, and a.k.a. the *god of war*. How ironic then, that your goal in the game is to, yup, destroy the god Ares.

While the game relies primarily on its fully interactive setting and fight moves, *God of War* throws some interesting cogs into the



basic action blueprint. Along with the requisite melee combat, you'll have to deal with stunts, traps, and story-driven puzzles that will test your Socratic method. The plot is surprisingly thorough, sadistically unraveling as the gameplay proceeds and featuring over an hour of in-game cut scenes. The various plot twists and multiple endings up the replay ante.

Designed by David Jaffe, the creator of the *Twisted Metal* franchise, the game's main appeal lies in its combat. With a slew of moves and ancient weapons, as well as a great variety of formidable mythical enemies (Cyclops, Medusa, the Minotaur), it delivers a fresh approach to action that will force you to think. None of it is intended for kids too young to properly spell *Iliad*; with plenty of blood and the odd decapitation, Sony harks back to ancient Greece in all its brutal glory. The combat system is fairly deep, and generally revolves around a unique double chain-blade weapon that can be maneuvered in a number of malicious ways.

With impressive environments and combat action, *God of War* is not the right way to bone up on your ancient proverbs and fables, but it's a lot of fun. —TP

Evil Genius

Muah ha ha ha!

Publisher
Vivendi Universal

Developer
Elixir Studios

Genre
Strategy

Release Date
Fall

PC

We've all been there, practicing our shrieking cackle in the mirror, devising the most fiendishly clever ways to take over the world as Supreme Overlord and rename it Planet Me. It's a phase that most of us outgrew. For those of you that still dream of world domination, VU has developed a clever strategy game allowing you to harness that evil in the name of...uh...evil (pronounced Eeh-Veal).

With a satirical 1960s spy background, *Evil Genius* makes players build secret bases, set traps, train loyal minions, research weapons, and plan fiendish missions. As you cultivate your dastardly empire, you will eventually undertake such heinous missions as stealing the Eiffel Tower and kidnapping pop stars, which ultimately do more good for the world than harm. No matter, a variety of skills and settings will make each evil plan more diabolical than the one before it. When it's all done, you will be the master of the world. Now repeat after us: Ah ha ha ha ha!!!

—TP



Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude

Co-ed naked adventure gaming! Chug! Chug! Chug!

Publisher
Vivendi Universal

Developer
High Voltage

Genre
Adventure

Release Date
Fall

PC | PS2 | Xbox

He's back. The oversexed gaming pioneer that set the bar for the 1980s' horniest teenagers has returned with a new title that will once again see



him serenading barmaids, cocktail waitresses, and, well, sluts. The polyester-clad Larry in question this time around is Larry Loveage, the nephew of the previous titles' groundbreaking player with no game, Larry Laffer.

On *Magna Cum Laude*, college student Larry goes to bars and explores the campus, all in the hopes that he may someday bed his biology teacher. He eventually makes his case to be on a reality television show, so that he can take the Tao of Larry nationwide. Given the success of raunchy comedies like the *American Pie* trilogy, *Leisure Suit Larry* isn't quite the noxious sack of dirty jokes it used to be, but with plenty of mini-games, including Quarters, Trampoline, and Whack-a-mole, the gameplay is lengthy. The new and improved cinematics include more than 90,000 words of dialogue, which might add up to a full *Leisure Suit Larry* renaissance. College co-eds be warned.

—TP

Mortal Kombat: Deception

Impaling Raiden never gets old

Publisher
Midway

Developer
Midway

Genre
Fighting

Release Date
Winter

PS2 | Xbox

For a series that debuted all the way back in 1992 in arcades, *Mortal Kombat* sure hasn't matured much. That's exactly what makes it so desirable.

Blood is still spilling by the bucket, fatalities are more exaggerated and visceral than ever, and our favorite female character's clothing just keeps on getting skimpier. That's all well and good, but this sixth installment in the series tosses last year's *Deadly Alliance* in the spike pit in terms of added functionality, too.

For one, Baraka, Sub-Zero, and the rest of the gang will make their way online in *Deception*, fueling the midnight gaming urges of button-mashers everywhere. Multitiered environments (à la *Dead or Alive 3*) with branching paths make those matches more enthralling. The arenas are rife with destructive elements, too, providing for some creative impalement tools for empowered players. Did we mention there are still vats upon vats of blood? Just making sure. —Jon M. Gibson



Shadow Ops: Red Mercury

Not to be confused with Special Ops

Publisher
Atari

Developer
Zombie

Genre
Action

Release Date
June

PC | Xbox



What exactly is red mercury, anyway? Turns out it's not an aging rock band from the 1970s, but a nuclear accelerant rumored to be distributed among

terrorists. Nobody has actually ever seen it, but that doesn't mean this mysterious chemical can't inspire a first-person shooter.

Designed using a massively-tweaked Unreal engine, *Shadow Ops* takes wannabe Delta Force gamers on a globe-trotting quest to track down said explosive. Russia, Bosnia, the Philippines, the Middle East, Western Europe—the US government spares no plane fare to thwart baddies. Along the way, Special Forces agents will aid you in missions (alas, they are AI controlled).

With tasks ranging from hostage rescues to bodyguard duty to full-on destruction missions, not to mention a well-rounded, 16-player mode, *Shadow Ops* promises to prevail over the glut of run-and-gun shooters hitting shelves this summer. Besides, can you think of any other ambiguous, radioactive liquid that has headlined a potential franchise? Leave that Paris Hilton tape out of this. —JG

Star Wars: Republic Commando

Star Wars sans jedi

Publisher
LucasArts

Developer
LucasArts

Genre
FPS

Release Date
Fall

PC | Xbox



Republic Commando. Those two words kind of resonate an unyielding machismo, like *Ultimate Warrior* or *Black Sabbath*. So, to see them affixed to a *Star Wars* title is a little awkward. Jedis aren't exactly commandos, after all. They are lithe tacticians, the *Star Wars* equivalent of secret agent Yoga instructors.

LucasArts deconstructs that image with its latest title, introducing a dark and foreboding first-person shooter for Xbox and PC. Using an advanced version of the Unreal engine, LucasArts concentrates its efforts on expanding its gaming core. The RPG *Knights of the Old Republic* has proven to be a landmark title, and by the looks of *Republic Commando*, LucasArts wants

similar results from the FPS market.

As an elite squad member in a Republic Special Operations unit, you are thrust deep into enemy territory. With eight distinct environments, from the surface of the planet Geonosis to the interior of a Separatist Core Ship, you'll navigate through several unique levels. Each presents an equally unique mission, be it hostage rescue, data retrieval, or assassination. With more than a dozen authentic weapons and an innovative "One-Touch Squad Control" command system, you'll need to think first, shoot later. Or, at least shoot first, think on your toes, then shoot again.

As one might expect, a boatful of multiplayer options will allow you to share the fun with others across the galaxy. If you want to keep it simple, there are Deathmatch, Team Deathmatch, and Capture the Flag games. If you really want to get crazy with multiplayer, you can go online and be one of up to 16 players to cooperatively destroy the dark side. May the Force be with you, because after you start playing this game seven hours a day, your girlfriend sure won't be.

—TP



Unreal Championship 2: The Liandri Conflict

Killing spree!

Publisher
Microsoft

Developer
Epic Games

Genre
FPS

Release Date
Winter

Xbox

If you're an *Unreal* fan without an Xbox, this holiday season might be the time to hit your folks up for one. *Unreal Championship 2: The Liandri Conflict* is an Xbox exclusive that utilizes the Xbox Live service, and it will be everything *Unreal* fans expect and a whole lot more.

With a simple button push, the first-person shooter adds a third-person view for better control when jumping or in melee fighting. Yes, melee combat is new to the franchise, and each of the 14 playable characters will have a default melee weapon. You can use this weapon to deflect enemy projectiles back to the jerk that threw them or to dice someone up from behind.

The characters have unique individual traits, as well as ones specific to their race, each also has different armors and strengths. For example, each race has a specialized weapon. However, melee weapons, health, and agility attributes are unique to the individuals. Each character can carry four weapons, and you can pick up weapons your enemies drop. Depending on the qualities of your character, you will have to arm yourself with the appropriate weapons; not every tool will suit every character. *Unreal Championship 2* includes finishing moves for topping off your victory.

The adrenaline powers you pick up will power

your moves, but you will not need them if you want to deflect bullets and rockets. Adrenaline will allow for powers like speed and energy drain and accurate timing with melee weapons.

With Xbox Live, you can play with seven others in roughly 50 maps and the usual multiplayer modes. You can play locally via system link. In single-player mode, the two-part game allows you to play different characters. —LS



Ghost Recon 2

Tom Clancy strikes back

Publisher
Ubisoft

Developer
Red Storm Entertainment

Genre
Action

Release Date
Winter

PC | PS2 | Xbox

War, whether it's the era of Hitler or terrorist regimes, is the name of the game for Ubisoft. With *Ghost Recon 2*, the publisher slips snugly into the near-future combat genre.

"Our ultimate goal is to become the primary player in the military shooter game arena," says Ubisoft President and CEO Yves Guillemot. As *Call of Duty*, *Medal of Honor*, and *Battlefield* head for retail shores, he's pretty close to that goal. With Tom Clancy's fast-selling franchise leading the pack, this publisher's credibility can only increase.

Dropping players into an all-too-real conflict in East Asia, it's the first true sequel since the recent crop of *Ghost Recon* fare (*Desert Siege*, *Jungle Storm*, and *Island Thunder*). Without further reconnaissance, the war-primed publisher will only



confirm that emotions will run deeper, action will rear more intensity, and multiplayer (on PC and consoles alike) will be something of a marvel. If all rings true, Tom Clancy may reign as victor in the great videogame skirmish of 2004.

—JG

Rainbow Six 3: Black Arrow

Return of the Tom Clancy

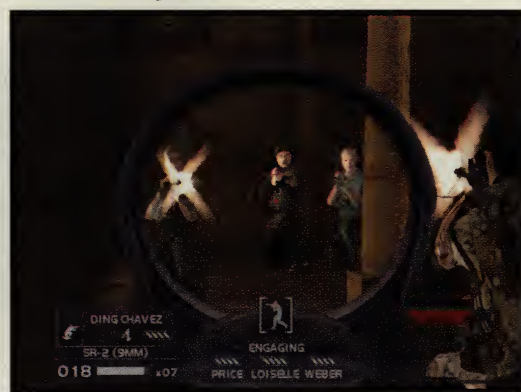
Publisher
Ubisoft

Developer
Ubisoft Montreal

Genre
Action

Release Date
August

Xbox



"*Rainbow Six 3* has owned Xbox Live for months now," boasts Tony Kee, vice president of marketing for Ubisoft. "Gamers can't get enough." He's not lying.

The frenzied, four-man squads of the popular Tom Clancy riff have taken broadband-jacked players by storm—or, for authenticity's sake, by the blunt end of an AK-47. While *Black Arrow* bares the marks of an expansion pack, the added content far exceeds that of a few extra maps. Online, the action will be furiously competitive, as this gun-toting sequel is one



of the first games to adopt Xbox Live 3.0 traits.

User-created tournaments are the biggest plus, and subscribers will be able to organize clans of *Rainbow Six* denizens and meet in private lobbies to discuss battlefield tactics, making the action at hand even more strategic, just like Clancy likes it. Capture the Point and Capture the Flag are piled onto the already available multiplayer modes. You'd best scratch that itchy trigger finger, though, because the bullets don't start zipping until August.

—JG

The Getaway 2

Now with 50 percent more cockney!

Publisher
SCEA

Developer
Team Soho

Genre
3D Vehicle/Action

Release Date
Winter

PS2

The Getaway was a great looking game with amazing atmosphere and voice acting. Unfortunately, a number of small game-mechanic oversights (like the horrible navigation system and a ridiculous healing process) hampered this potentially great title. With *The Getaway 2*, Sony and Team Soho are refining the series with the care it deserves.

The protagonists from the first game, ex-mob boy Mark Hammond and Flying Squad spaz Frank Carter, have been left behind for an entirely new story centered on a boxer, bouncer, and part-time badass named Eddie O'Connor. Sony has yet to share the general plot with us, but expect more of the multiple-perspective, cockney-laden storyline à la Guy Ritchie, with central London and its gritty underground serving as the setting once again.

With an overhauled graphics engine that allows denser populations and better textured buildings, London looks even more realistic than the first game. Let's hope they give us a map this time, so



we can see the sights and tour the pubs in between gunfights, eh?

Expect *The Getaway 2* to vary the gameplay more than the first game, with an even balance of gunplay, stealth, and car chases to round out your experience.

If the full promise of the first game is fulfilled this time around, *The Getaway 2* could be a runaway success this holiday.

—MB



Men of Valor

Moral ambiguity included

Publisher
Vivendi Universal

Developer
2015

Genre
FPS

Release Date
October

Xbox



The battle between this year's Vietnam games is fierce, but developer 2015 hopes its first-person shooter, *Men of Valor*, has what it takes to win. Developed by the team responsible for *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault*, *Men of Valor* puts players in control of US Marine Dean Shepard and sends them through a harrowing tour of duty in late-1960s Vietnam. That tour can be played in a single-player mode or in co-op through system link or Xbox Live. (The game boasts Live-enabled multiplayer battles that allow players to fight the war from either side.)

Fans of historical war games will know they're not in World War II anymore as soon as they experience the game's lush foliage. Contrast the confidence and sense of duty found in familiar World War II titles with the experience awaiting *Men of Valor*'s players: in this videogame Vietnam, your fellow soldiers express doubts about their missions;

your family sends worried letters from an America wracked with protest; and the combat itself is drenched in the panic and confusing conflict against often-unseen foes firing from all sides of the jungles and villages.

During your gameplay missions, you'll patrol jungles on foot, man the guns of helicopters, and pilot a riverboat past dangerous shores. One mission we saw culminated with the American forces calling in a napalm strike that set the jungle afire with an impressively immense blaze. The developers promise a plot that will follow the African-American Shepard in increasingly important missions while unflinchingly contending with everything from race relations among his fellow soldiers to torture committed by both sides in the war.

All signs indicate a take on the war that is mature in the truest sense of the word.

—ST

Silent Hill 4: The Room

Boo!

Publisher
Konami

Developer
Konami

Genre
Survival Horror

Release Date
Fall

PS2 | Xbox

Ah, the shroud and mist of the fog. The seemingly perpetual darkness that covers the town. The psychotic paintings on the wall. The streets devoid of any living being. The noises in your head. And monsters. Lots of monsters. It can only be another installment of *Silent Hill*.

Slated for the fall, the fourth installment of the survival/horror series will be a completely new game with a new story.

Like previous releases, this sequel shares the game's namesake town (and possibly a few familiar objects) and the usual feeling of "How did I get here?" and "What the hell am I doing here?" But, there will be no connection to Heather, Mary, or any previous characters.

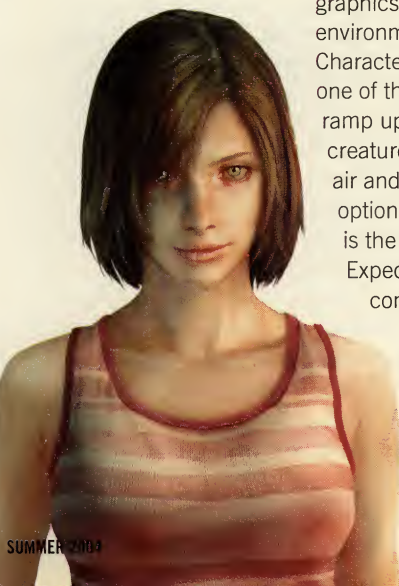
True to the series, you start off without any idea of what to do or where to go. To move ahead, you must remove the confusion the game sets up in each scene. Simply running away won't get you anywhere. You play Henry Townshend, who finds himself trapped inside his apartment, with a door that is locked up with chains. As the game progresses, Townshend finds portals that open up inside the apartment, which lead him into the nightmarish world that is *Silent Hill*.

Silent Hill 3 had the most visually delicious graphics, with extremely realistic-looking environments, creatures, and facial features. Character animation was fluid, and the game was one of the creepiest ever developed. *Silent Hill 4* will ramp up the graphics even more, with gruesome creatures that travel through walls and float through air and chillier surroundings. A first-person view option is now available in certain instances, as is the ability to change weapons in real time.

Expect the sound and music, developed by *SH* composer Akira Yamaoka, to be terrifying.

Some *SH3* players complained that the game ended too quickly. With more weapons to choose from, tougher-to-solve puzzles, and a more confusing storyline, *Silent Hill 4* promises to freak you out for even longer.

—LS



X-Men Legends

Marvel-us

Publisher
Activision

Developer
Raven Software

Genre
Action RPG

Release Date
Fall 2004

GC | PS2 | Xbox



The X-Men have been featured in just about every gaming format, but Activision is the first to drop these lovable mutants in an RPG-based action title. The reason nobody thought of this before is beyond us. Choosing from more than a dozen of your favorite X-Men, including Wolverine, Gambit, and Storm, you must stop the evil Magneto and his Brotherhood of

Mutants from using their new supreme powers to imprison the human race.

Using the classic comic book instead of the X-Men movies as a canvas, the designers collaborated with former Marvel comics writers, who have penned an authentic series of twists and turns that will make aficionados and purists happy. That means more than 35 fully rendered cinematic sequences and vast playing environments. Solid character renderings and the ability to beef up specific gifts in each beloved X-Person makes *Legends* every X-Maniac's dream game.

As fun as solo missions sound, *Legends* also offers a two-player cooperative mode, in which each player controls two mutants to make a more cohesive X-Unit in the endless battle against Magneto. Going solo means harnessing four separate X-Men, maneuvering each one based on his/her particular skills. If your only X-Men references are the Bryan Singer movies starring Picard and Gandalf, you might expect a short learning curve as you discover each character's capabilities.

While the basic foundation of *Legends* is definitely the RPG, with its strategy and sprawling environments, don't downplay the action. There is plenty of it, and as you strengthen your characters' powers, you learn a variety of new fight moves. Add all that to a load of unlockables along the way, and you've got an X-Men title of the highest pedigree.

—TP



Spider-Man 2

Our tie-in senses are tingling

Publisher
Activision

Developer
Treyarch

Genre
Action

Release Date
Summer

GC | PS2 | Xbox

When releasing a game based on a big-screen blockbuster, many publishers face what Peter Parker discovered after receiving his Spidey powers: it is his gift and his curse. Movie-based games generate buzz easily, so their publishers receive added publicity from Hollywood's advertising muscle. In the rush to make the game's release coincide with that of the movie, sometimes the goods fall short of expectations. Case in point: Activision's *Spider-Man*, which received mixed reviews from both players and critics. You either loved it or hated it.

With the release of the movie sequel this summer, Activision will once again deliver a tie-in game, *Spider-Man 2*, but this title packs a bunch of improvements on the first.

The game will follow the movie's plot, which finds Parker dealing with his crybaby issues—you would, too, if you had sticky goo shooting out of your body—and a new villain, the multiarmed Dr. Otto Octavius (or Doc Ock). The game doesn't simply rehash the film though, as Activision extends the storyline by adding such Marvel villains as Mysterio and Black Cat to the soup.

The most significant improvement is how Spidey swings through the city. The webs now latch onto objects in the world and the movement feels more like the pendular physics *Spider-Man* gets to experience in—er—real life. To further keep things consistent in our Marvel-influenced reality, you can now shoot a



second web for maneuverability as well. Spidey can also climb walls with the quickness of his arachnid friends and jump much farther than you or me.

With a bit of *GTA*-esque gameplay, you can explore all of virtual Manhattan (to scale), interact with people on the streets, and climb around buildings. There are voluntary missions like fighting petty crime and helping New York's citizens, but you'll have to complete specific assignments to get the story moving.

When the criminals come out to play, Spidey's versatility is what you would expect from a superhero; his speed allows him to toy with enemies, and his web-shot comes in handy for removing those illegal firearms from the confused and frightened felons. As Spidey continues to break up crimes on the street, his hero rating will rise, which in turn will let him pull off sweeter than sweet attack combinations.

Judging from our brief initial take, *Spider-Man 2* may break its predecessor's curse. Our spidey sense is tingling just thinking about it.

—LS

The ABCs of LAN

Pull off the perfect gaming party

When you think about LAN parties, big annual events like QuakeCon probably come to mind. But you don't need to rent a hotel banquet room or invite thousands of people to enjoy an excellent night of group gaming. In fact, with just a few computers, you can host a LAN event that will produce high body counts, massive virtual destruction, and screams of triumph and humiliation from you and your friends. Small-to-medium-sized LAN parties are not only easier to pull off than a full-on game gala, but they're also more intimate, providing everyone at

least a brief share of the spotlight.

Even if you're gathering only a few people, make a quick checklist before you start, lest you want your soiree to be memorable for all the things that went wrong. No amount of preparation will cover every possible scenario—we're dealing with technology, after all—but if you follow these tips, your LAN should run smoothly.

Best LAN Plans

When planning a LAN party, step one is making sure that the people you most want to game with can actually make it. This is vital to your party's success. You don't want to get stuck with a household of whiners and sore losers. While you'll always have to deal with schedule conflicts, it's best to give everyone some notice.

Once you settle upon a date, take into account the actual space you have to work with for the event. While you can try and find an offsite location like a hotel meeting room or banquet hall, this is overkill in most cases. Even small apartments offer adequate space, provided you have tables, chairs, and a little extra room for people who aren't playing.

While this may seem like a given, you should let your guests know whether or not they'll need to supply their own machines. If you're supplying the hardware, either because you have several computers or are renting them, be sure you have enough mice, keyboards, and monitors, too. Have a couple of extra mice and keyboards on hand, in case anyone forgets. Trust us, someone will.

In some cases, you'll use a mix of your own systems and some friends' computers. Arrange for those guests that are porting their PCs to show up early. This allows time to work out the kinks that will inevitably arise.





\$ 1716

XPLODER XS 8000 NOTEBOOK

- 800 Mhz Front Side Bus and 512KB Advanced Transfer Cache
- 1024 PC2700 DDR333 Memory
- 80GB Ultra ATA100 Hard Drive
- Mobile ATI Radeon 9600 PRO 128MB Video
- 15.4" WXGA Wide-Screen TFT Display 1280x800 Pixels
- 16X/2X CD-RW/DVD-RW Combo Drive
- 10/100 Network Card & 56K V.92 Modem
- Wireless 802.11G 54Mbps Networking
- 3-in-1 Built-in Media Reader
- 1 Firewire IEEE 1394 & 3 USB 2.0 Ports
- 1 PCMCIA Type II Slot
- Weight only 6.39 Lbs
- Microsoft Window XP Home Edition
- Free Carrying Case
- 7 Custom Colors to Choose From

Intel® Pentium® 4 3.4Ghz 800MHz FSB \$ 1973 CNB661
 Intel® Pentium® 4 3.2Ghz 800MHz FSB \$ 1824 CNB662
 Intel® Pentium® 4 3.0Ghz 800MHz FSB \$ 1758 CNB663
 Intel® Pentium® 4 2.8Ghz 800MHz FSB \$ 1716 CNB664

Get more done, have more fun.

You can quickly run multiple applications at once with a CYBERPOWER System based on the Intel® Pentium® 4 Processor with HT Technology.



\$ 1699

BAMER INFINITY 8800 PRO

- Intel® I875PE Chipset 800Mhz FSB 8X AGP MB
- 1024MB PC3200 Dual Channel DDR400 Memory
- 200GB 7200RPM 8MB Cache Serial ATA150 HD
- ATI® RADEON™ 9800-XT 256MB DDR Video Card w/ TV Out & DVI
- Free Half-Life 2 Full Version Game
- NEC 8X DVD+RW Drive 2500A
- 16X DVD-ROM & 52X32X52 CD-RW Combo Drive
- 5.1 3D Surround Onboard Sound
- Creative Inspire S560 5.1 Surround Sound System
- 19" Viewsonic® E90F+ SB TwoTone Silver/Blk 22MM 1800 x 1400 SVGA w/ Ultra Bright Technology
- Creative Lab V92 Fax Modem w/ Voice
- 1.44MB Floppy Drive
- Ideazon CrossFire Gaming Swapable Z-Board
- Microsoft® USB Optical Mouse
- **Aluminum** X-Super Alien Server Tower Case 425W w/ MOD "See Through Windows" & Neon Light
- 6 Cool Custom Colors to Choose From
- Microsoft® Windows® XP Home Edition
- Microsoft® Work 7.0 & Norton Anti Virus 2004
- Free First Year On Site Service plus 24/7 Tech Support

Intel® Pentium® 4 3.4Ghz 800MHz FSB \$ 1949 CBA601
 Intel® Pentium® 4 3.2Ghz 800MHz FSB \$ 1799 CBA602
 Intel® Pentium® 4 3.0Ghz 800MHz FSB \$ 1745 CBA603
 Intel® Pentium® 4 2.8Ghz 800MHz FSB \$ 1699 CBA604



\$ 929

BAMER INFINITY 8000 DREAM

- Intel® I865PE Chipset 800Mhz FSB 8X AGP MB
- 512MB PC3200 Dual Channel DDR400 Memory
- 120GB 7200RPM Ultra ATA100 Hard Drive
- NVIDIA® GeForce™ FX 5700 256MB DDR w/ TV Out & DVI
- NU 8X DVD+RW Drive
- AC97 3D 5.1 Surround Sound
- Creative Inspire S560 5.1 Surround Sound System
- Creative Lab V.92 Fax Modem w/ Voice
- 1.44MB Floppy Drive
- Ideazon CrossFire Gaming Swapable Z-Board
- Microsoft® USB Optical Mouse
- **Aluminum** A-Top Z- Alien Server Tower Case 450W w/ MOD "See Through Windows" & Neon Light
- 6 Cool Custom Colors to Choose From
- Microsoft® Windows® XP Home Edition
- Microsoft® Work 7.0
- Norton Anti Virus 2004
- Free First Year On Site Service plus 24/7 Tech Support

Intel® Pentium® 4 3.4Ghz 800MHz FSB \$ 1179 CBC601
 Intel® Pentium® 4 3.2Ghz 800MHz FSB \$ 1035 CBC602
 Intel® Pentium® 4 3.0Ghz 800MHz FSB \$ 975 CBC603
 Intel® Pentium® 4 2.8Ghz 800MHz FSB \$ 929 CBC604



\$ 715

XP 8000 DREAM

- Intel® I865PE Chipset 800Mhz FSB 8X AGP MB
- 512MB PC3200 Dual Channel DDR400 Memory
- 80GB 7200RPM AIA100 Hard Drive
- NVIDIA® GeForce™ FX 5200 8X AGP 128MB DDR w/ TV Out
- 16X DVD-ROM
- 52X32X52 CD-RW Drive
- 3D 5.1 Sound & 600Watt Subwoofer System
- 56K V.90 Fax Modem w/ Voice
- Mitsumi 1.44MB Floppy Drive
- Internet Multimedia Keyboard & Internet Mouse
- **Turbo X-Infinity Case 420Watt with See Through Windows and Sound Activated Neon Light.**
- 6 Cool Custom Colors to Choose From
- Microsoft® Windows® XP Home Edition
- Microsoft® Work 7.0
- Free First Year On Site Service plus 24/7 Tech Support
- Upgrade to Viewsonic® Office Keyboard and Optical Mouse +\$49

Intel® Pentium® 4 3.4Ghz 800MHz FSB \$ 965 C6021
 Intel® Pentium® 4 3.2Ghz 800MHz FSB \$ 819 C6022
 Intel® Pentium® 4 3.0Ghz 800MHz FSB \$ 755 C6023
 Intel® Pentium® 4 2.8Ghz 800MHz FSB \$ 715 C6024



WITH JUST A FEW COMPUTERS, YOU CAN HOST A LAN EVENT THAT WILL PRODUCE HIGH BODY COUNTS, MASSIVE VIRTUAL DESTRUCTION, AND SCREAMS OF TRIUMPH AND HUMILIATION FROM YOU AND YOUR FRIENDS.

Ten Tips from a Zen-LAN Master

As a veteran of LAN parties, I can assure you things are bound to go wrong. It's your party, and people will look to you for answers. You need to remain calm under pressure. In a perfect world, you'd be able to set up your eight or ten PCs for spontaneous LAN showdowns, but this will seldom occur. Instead, you need to use those Darwinian skills they talk about in science forums and adapt to circumstances. The following tips will guard against a lame LAN.

BACKUP RIGS If possible, have a backup machine handy and try to keep an even number of computers in use. This allows for balanced teams, and having an extra computer means you can swap out a glitchy system in a few minutes without halting gameplay.

CABLES, LOTS OF CABLES Some parties require stocking up on Stoli and Jack Daniel's. Yours, on the other hand, demands plenty of RJ-45 Ethernet cable, whether you're supplying the computers or not. Even if all your guests remember to bring their own cables, there's no guarantee those cables will be long enough. Worse, RJ-45s tend to crap out at the worst possible moments; making a few backups is a necessity. Play it safe and get a cable tester so you can determine if a cable is bad. You'll save time by not switching out cables if the problem is on the PC side.

USE THE SAME OS Since most LAN parties are PC-based events, arrange for as many as possible to be running Windows XP. All of the machines should be using the latest updates and patches. This ensures that the machines won't find conflicts on the software side. Additionally, the games absolutely need to be the same version. As the host, you should have a CD-ROM with the latest patches for any games you're planning on running.

USE A SERVER If it's within your means, run a dedicated server. You'll be down one machine right off the bat (remember, have backups on hand), but this will improve gameplay greatly.

BYOG No doubt, it's too expensive for you to buy

Put Your LAN on the Map

Depending on the game, you will usually find a game mode for every group size. Keep this in mind when it comes to maps, map rotation, game time limits, and even the games you play. Don't start the night with a "quick" game of multiplayer *Dungeon Siege* when most of the guests are waiting for a shooter showdown.

At the same time, some maps require a lot of people. A sprawling *Battlefield 1942* or *Desert Combat* map isn't going to work for two-on-two or three-on-three games. These demand more players and are better suited to online play or larger tournaments. Of course, if you absolutely have to try these larger locations, you can always finish the evening with humans vs. bots.

eight copies of one game, so you should ask your friends to supply their own copies for the evening. Martha Stewart would frown on it, but hey, you're supplying the LAN and probably the Doritos, too. With multiple copies you won't run into any conflicts, because each game has a unique serial number and can work only once on each server. This is an absolute given if you're trying to do a virtual LAN over the Internet with friends from distant locations.

SECURE THE PREMISES Make sure you have some kind of firewall in place. The built-in Windows XP firewall sometimes makes it hard for games to connect, so a third-party security program like BlackICE Defender or Norton Internet Security makes sense. These programs have a setting that allows trusted IP addresses and open ports just for gaming. The machine stays safe from hackers while it hosts a game. Be sure to test your firewall before the games begin; you don't want too much security.

POWER UP Whether you live in a house or an apartment, you'll want to make sure to have adequate juice. Too many power strips? No such thing. Pick up

a couple more for your party. Have some extension cords ready, and if possible, use these to tap into power from another room. Overloaded circuits don't do much to boost a party atmosphere.

GAME VARIETY Be a considerate host. If your friends like to play real-time strategy games, don't force them to play first-person shooters all night. Likewise, make sure everyone gets to play, even if it means surrendering your own keyboard and mouse for a round. If your friends are supplying their own computers, make sure they're cool with someone else jumping on their machine when they answer nature's call.

WATCH THE VOLUME Even if you live in a house, you should be careful about the volume. Your neighbors might be more touchy than you realize, and cops tend to linger anywhere there's food, even if it is just a noise complaint. This doesn't mean you should rely on headphones (a good idea for apartment parties), but manage the noise accordingly.

HAVE FUN This may sound silly, but some hosts take their LAN parties too seriously. If you can't stand to lose, don't host LAN parties. After all, you're not holding a tournament. Keep it cool. ☺



Console Yourself

Nowhere is it written that LAN parties have to be strictly PC affairs. In fact, the PlayStation 2 and Xbox make for solid, instant party machines. With split-screen mode, you can get some nice four-on-four *Halo* action using just two Xboxes and two TVs. Even if you're having a PC party, it's a nice touch to have consoles set up. It's a little different, and everyone gets to stay in the gaming.



WIRELESS GAMING ADAPTER

HGA11



- Lag Free Wireless **Internet Console Gaming**
- Lag Free Wireless **Head-to-Head Gaming**
- Supports Most Consoles (PS2™, Xbox™, and GameCube™) with Network Adapters
- Zero Configuration Feature — Easy Installation, Plug and Play to Most Wireless Networks
- Eliminate Cable Clutter into Your Living Room



WHERE TO BUY

MICRO CENTER

amazon.com

COMPUSA

Fry's

Insight

COMPUTERS 4sure

CDW

PC Mall

CONTACT

1.888.662.8828

www.hawkingtech.com

sales@hawkingtech.com

Time to N-Gage?

With the new and improved N-Gage QD deck about to hit, we put Nokia on the hot seat about what went wrong, what it learned the hard way, and why we should care now.

Yes, there's an exterior game card slot, a game shortcut key, and you can make a phone call without looking like there's a taco growing out of your ear. But for the QD gaming deck, these "enhancements" may be arriving too late, especially when highly hyped portables from Sony and Nintendo are just around the corner.

The QD does demonstrate, however, that Nokia finally has its head in the game. Not only has the company fixed the N-Gage's first-generation flaws, but the device costs less than the original (\$199 without service; \$99 with), creates less of a bulge in your pocket, and sports a brighter screen and longer battery life. Most important for a device that's designed for online multiplayer action, the N-Gage Arena app comes preloaded.

Meanwhile, developers are finally starting to offer more than lame ports. Sega has *Pocket Kingdom: Own the World* in the pipeline. EA is offering a slick version of *The Sims Bustin' Out*. Both *Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Jungle Storm* (July) and Activision's *Call of Duty* franchise (end of the year) should give the platform a shot of adrenaline.

Jussi Nevanlinna, director of deck product and tech management, and Tom Nyberg, US product manager, talked to *SURGE* about the significance of the QD and why they think Nokia will connect with gamers this time around.

Lumps and Lessons

Did you do any focus group testing before the first N-Gage launched?

Jussi Nevanlinna: We did do testing, and some of the feedback we were not able to incorporate. So, we chose the time-to-market aspect of getting the first



product out there. We really learned in the actual marketplace rather than market research.

Look ma, a game slot!

What's your approach now?

JN: We do continuous testing with focus groups. That's the way to insert some of the feedback lessons with the product. Some of the improvements that we did, the better feedback for the keys and separating the joystick and Select key, those are things we can do pretty quickly.

Is the lower price for the QD an admission that the original N-Gage was just too expensive?

Tom Nyberg: I think it's a combination of things. We've been able to do work on our own to make us more competitive from a cost perspective. \$199 without the [carrier] subsidy is certainly close to a sweet spot. When you bring it to a \$99 price point, there's no question that the value proposition is extremely interesting.



The new QD deck is smaller, sports much-improved controls, and lets you talk normally. But Nokia has also lopped off a couple features, including the FM radio and MP3 player.

What else have the past six months taught Nokia?

TN: When working with new partners, it takes a lot of learning, especially because there are two industries coming together. There's a lot of learning from us about how the publishers really work. And there's a lot of learning from them about the wireless world because there are carriers, [and] there are players like us, and you need to have all of these elements in place to have a good online gaming experience. So that's been a very heavy but rewarding experience.

What did you get right the first time?

TN: If you really look at what is the core of the platform and the device, the connectivity—both over Bluetooth and the GSM networks—we hit that quite well with the first one. Now we've enhanced the overall experience.

QD Vs. the Competition

What are the biggest enhancements with the QD?

JN: Number one, the product is smaller, so footprint-wise, it fits easier in your pocket. The second improvement is gaming time, both in terms of not having to change the battery [to swap games] and battery consumption. Both hardware- and software-wise, we've been able to almost double the gaming time from six hours up to ten hours.

Does the QD feel more like a gaming device and less like a hybrid?

JN: What we did with the keys, as well as [with] the joystick, was improve response, what we call "tactile feedback." The screen is brighter, and your fingers actually cover the area around the screen, so it's all about the screen. You can keep your focus on the game.

How does your approach to gaming differ from Nintendo?

TN: With Nintendo, I think there's a few differences there. They are a 100 percent gaming company, and they've been doing that for years. So, they certainly understand that part of the game. I think we have a better understanding of truly mobile handheld devices that people have with them all of the time.

What about Sony?

TN: If you take the Sony comparison and talk about the PSP as the Walkman of this century, I think the mobile phone and the legacy that Nokia has with the most successful consumer electronics device of all time is very important. Bringing that knowledge and combining that with how you can bring that into a gaming experience is where we can bring something quite unique to the consumer.

Do you think you can fend off the new mobile consoles?

TN: If you look at the positioning of the device and talk about connected mobile online gaming, that's something which isn't there from anyone else in a mass market way. We are providing what we call this "pocketability" in a way that is unparalleled.

JN: I don't want to comment on products that are not out there yet, but in general, competition in the mobile space is good. It actually improves the overall industry and makes the market more interesting.

Online Aspirations**How do you launch N-Gage Arena using the QD, and what games support online multiplayer?**

JN: There's two ways to do it. You can either start the session within the game itself, or you can use the integrated Arena Launcher application in the product, so you can surf to the Arena site and start a match. We've launched a few titles like *Pathway to Glory* and *Pocket Kingdom* that you can actually play over the wireless networks. Those titles are on their way.

Is latency an issue with GPRS networks, as opposed to 3G networks?

TN: We've worked on minimizing that. Even with GPRS, when game developers know from day one what the limitations, opportunities, and possibilities of the platform and the technologies are, they can design good experiences in head-to-head gaming.

Are gamers taking advantage of Bluetooth?

JN: We are noticing that people are finding it a good way of gaming. When you're playing against someone that's in the same room, you get to see his or her face when they lose. There's an interesting dynamic there. People are excited about close-range playing. The first phase of the games were based on Bluetooth multiplayer, and now this second wave is coming along with GPRS.

What happens when the wireless carriers have to support thousands of simultaneous gaming sessions?

TN: We've been working together with the carriers in terms of understanding what are the peak times in the networks and what can be done to optimize network performance. We are capable of expanding in such a way so that people will want to go online and make it a part of their life in the morning or at night or sitting on the bus.

Games, Games, Games**How will the N-Gage's titles improve along with the hardware?**

JN: We have a platform, and we're improving it all the time, so from the developers' point of view, what we're seeing now is the second round of games. The graphics engines are improving quite a lot. Also, the

SDKs are improving, and the tools are improving. The developer offering is broadening all of the time, so I think it's easier to develop titles now.

Are there enough developers behind the N-Gage to make it successful?

TN: One of the things that we're happy about right now is that, within more or less a year, we've been able to build very strong relationships with every big publisher in the world. And if you really look at our games and the portfolio evolving this year, all of them are building up significant investment and are bringing their best titles to this platform.

Do you think you've been getting enough support from EA?

TN: If you look at the lineup that we have from them right now and the implementations and how the games really look, I think you can see that they're putting in some serious effort. And like every publisher and developer that we are working with, it's kind of a piece-by-piece process of being able to utilize the potential of the platform. I think you'll see some further announcements in the next couple of months.

What games are you most excited about?

TN: It all depends on what kind of person you are. I've been extremely impressed by *The Sims Bustin' Out*. We're seeing some nice things coming from the first-person shooter front, as well. *FIFA Soccer* is also a cool game.

Does the N-Gage have a killer title?

TN: From our perspective, *Pathway to Glory* is going to be. That is already quite impressive now with what we've been seeing. People are going to be surprised. It's a Second World War strategy game with a lot of online and multiplayer components in it, so it's going to be a huge thing in the second half of this year. ☺

—Mark Spoonauer

"THERE'S A LOT OF LEARNING FROM US ABOUT HOW THE PUBLISHERS REALLY WORK. AND THERE'S A LOT OF LEARNING FROM THEM ABOUT THE WIRELESS WORLD."

—TOM NYBERG, NOKIA PRODUCT MANAGER



First-person shooters like *Ashen* should up the ante for N-Gage fare, with nine types of weapons, a ghost vision mode for detecting hidden enemies, and multiplayer support for up to four people via Bluetooth.

Totally Retro

Take a trip down arcade lane—on your cell—with these oldies but goodies.

Sooner or later, every good console game makes its way to the cell phone world. The translation often leaves much to be desired, especially when a lush 3D adventure gets hacked into just another side-scroller. The solution? Lower your expectations. Or, go retro with THQ Wireless' (www.thqwireless.com) new lineup of five classics, including hits from the 1980s and 1990s. What you saw then is what you get now. Here's the best of the nostalgic bunch.

Defender

You know the drill: Defend the human population on the ground from swarms of attacking aliens using your space fighter's laser cannon. Also at your disposal is a limited supply of smart bombs. A radar display at the top of the screen helps you locate enemies, represented by teeny, tiny dots. The graphics from this 1980 classic are still god-awful, but the gameplay is fast and fun.

Joust

The concept is just as weird as it was back in 1982. You're a knight flying on the back of—what else?—an ostrich, battling buzzard-mounted enemies. Remember, it's not the size of your lance, it's whether you can flap your wings fast enough to get above your foes to strike them down.

Marble Madness

For a cell phone game, this title has serious balls. Guide your marbles through various courses to reach your goal. Obstacles include marble munchers, acid pools, an evil steelie marble, and, if you're driving while playing, potentially fatal car accidents. The playing field is kept interesting enough, though, with ice patches, catapults, and other diversions.

Mortal Kombat

"Get over here!" Arguably the best 2D fighter of all time is back with a vengeance, complete with the aforementioned sound bite and your choice of four characters. There are only two backgrounds, but the animations will satisfy most mobile sadists with high and low kicks, punches, jumps, blocks, recoils, a "signature" move, and a falling/dying frame.

Spy Hunter

Before *Knight Rider* and *Kit* were household names, this 1983 driving and shooting game set arcades on fire with its selection of cool weapons, from smoke screens and oil slicks to missiles and machine gun fire. Just like the original, you can take to the water in a speedboat to battle the bad guys when you get tired of looking at asphalt.

—Mark Spoonauer



Fight Night 2004

The new lord of the ring

Publisher EA Sports | Developer EA Sports | Genre Sports | ESRB T | Format PS2, Xbox

Since the watershed event that was the release of *Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!!* in 1986, the boxing genre hasn't received so much as an upgrade. With all the bogus Evander Holyfield- and James "Buster" Douglas-endorsed games, pro-boxing titles have taken a hit in the solar plexus. Even Iron Mike hasn't recovered from the lag. Leave it to EA Sports to deliver a resounding haymaker to console boxing.

Fight Night 2004, a definite upgrade over *Knockout Kings 2003*, is the first boxing title in years to aim for greater realism and succeed. Just like EA did with its *MVP Baseball 2003*, the publisher/designer started from scratch and came out with a new landmark sports title. The controls and gameplay definitely take

some getting used to, but the immersive training mode makes that less of a chore. The use of analog sticks as your fists takes a bit more practice than just mindlessly pushing buttons in a random sequence. But by the time you're ready for the big fights, you'll be impressed by the controls, rather than intimidated. The online fight mode, available only on the PS2 version, fosters the greatest opportunities for serious trash talk of any online sports game. When you've knocked your opponent out, you can tell them anything, and they'll believe it.

What truly sets this boxing title apart is its sprawling career mode. Instead of just coasting from fight to fight, you'll be selecting your opponents, stocking up





on equipment, and going through your prizes and trophies. The opponent-selection process is a huge task in itself, especially with a roster that includes Roy Jones Jr., Felix Trinidad, Bernard Hopkins, Lennox Lewis, Muhammad Ali, and Joe Frazier.

The fact that you are forced to retire at age 40 is a little disappointing, but the replay value is very high on this game, and the challenge of proving your mettle against the world's best, instead of fictional flyweights like Soda Popinski and Bald Bull, makes this an all-too-real fighting experience.

—Tal Pinchevsky



Battlefield Vietnam

Welcome to the jungle

Publisher EA Games | Developer Digital Illusions | Genre FPS | ESRB T | Format PC

Spend six weeks in the bush fighting Charlie, and you're not the same person you were when you went in. Considering the amount of time you'll want to spend in *Battlefield Vietnam*, you may emerge from your basement without any friends or family.

Battlefield Vietnam picks up the tempo from its *BF1942* brethren to reflect the new weapons available to you in 'Nam, and EA has done a good job of balancing the fighting with the various North Vietnamese Army (NVA) and US weapons. While a Marine can spend his afternoon mowing down opponents unmercifully with a nearly unstoppable M60, Charlie can riddle the maps with booby traps and dig respawn points anywhere in the map, including inside enemy camps. For air battles, the US has choppers that can transport tanks across the battlefield and F4 Phantoms for your standard Napalm runs. Meanwhile, the NVA have access to Russian MiGs and choppers.

The single-player mode offers improved bot AI,

but let's not kid ourselves: this is a multiplayer game. The maps are large and vary from city to riverbed to jungle scenarios. Many of the maps are so large that we don't advise you to join servers with fewer than 16 players, unless you want to play your own version of *Going After Cacciato*.

With semicustomizable characters, a great soundtrack from the period, and rice paddies galore, *BF Vietnam* is high on atmosphere. If the music grows stale over the many days you spend up to your neck in the steaming jungles, you can import your own tunes (the people you're playing with won't hear them). Though the jungles aren't as thick as we would like, the brush is dense enough to hide snipers from sight and keep the battles interesting.

In the end, *Battlefield Vietnam* feels more like a mod on par with *Desert Combat* than its own unique game. In a sense, this is exactly what many of us wanted, but a few new innovative battle modes would have helped this game jump to the top of our 2004 list.

—Matt Bertz



Rating
8
10



City of Heroes

All that Spandex has gotta chafe

Publisher NCsoft | Developer Cryptic Studios | Genre MMORPG | ESRB T | Format PC

We're tempted to give *City of Heroes* a glowing review simply for not taking place in a Middle-earthian realm of goblins and gold pieces and crap. The fact that it's a hell of a lot of fun is just a bonus. It's as combat-obsessed as every other MMORPG, but the difference here is that the combat is fast paced, varied, and very entertaining.

City of Heroes gives players a robust character-creation scheme in which you whip up a detailed costume and choose one of five origins (chemical spill, mutated DNA, etc.) and archetypes (melee fighter, projectile fighter, etc.). After that, you equip yourself with several of the powers associated with your archetype. It's an enjoyable, almost addictive process.

The combat sequence plays out in real time with your character's powers bound to number keys for ease of use. Some enemies drop power-ups that you can pick up to enhance your stats. Perhaps the keenest aspect of combat is a "sidekick" feature in which lower-level players can adventure with beefier brethren without suffering instant death. Most of the game's combat is tied into lengthy missions, so you always feel like you're working toward a genuine goal, instead of just delivering random beat-downs to people.

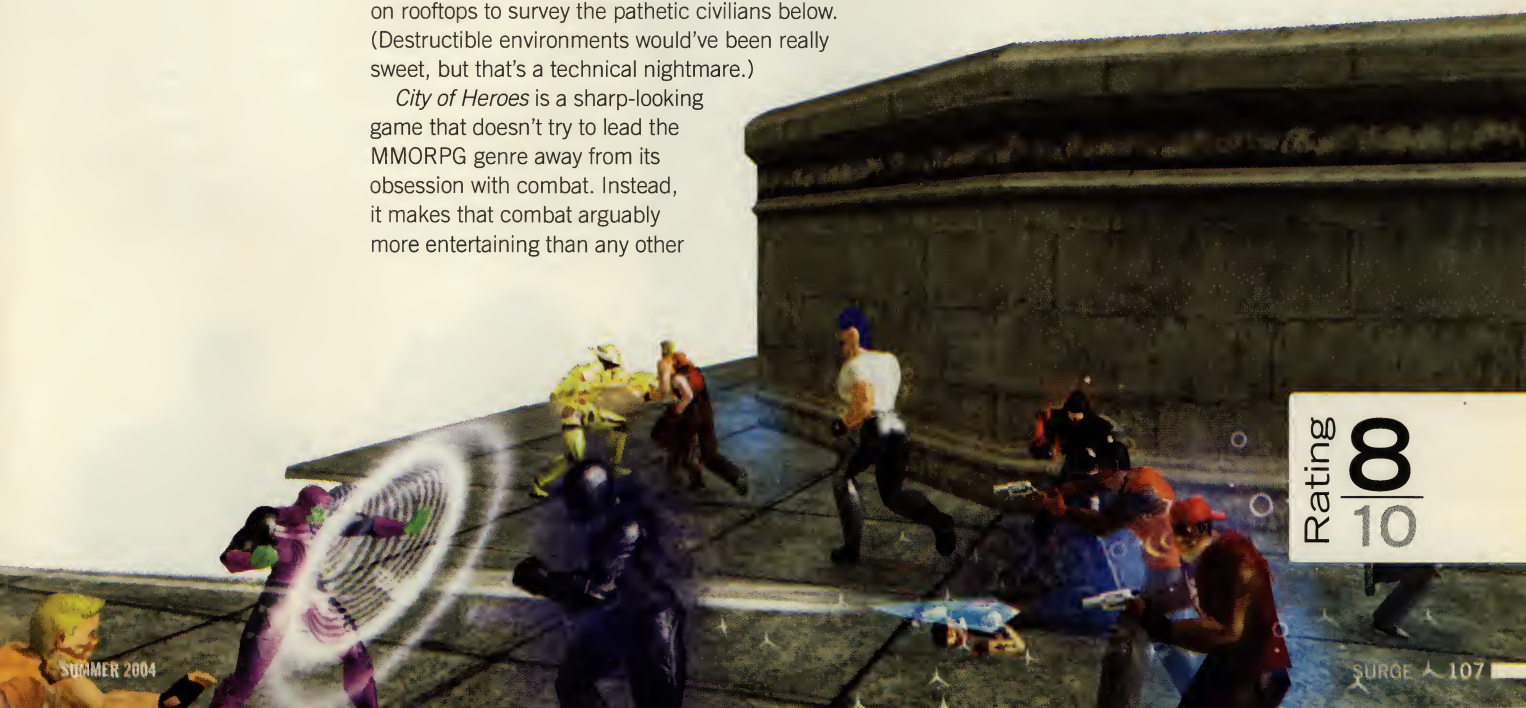
Thanks to the robust number of costumes, the clone-horde phenomenon is much less prevalent in *City of Heroes* than in most MMORPGs. You can even gain a flight power and explore the whole of the game's massive Paragon City from above, landing on rooftops to survey the pathetic civilians below. (Destructible environments would've been really sweet, but that's a technical nightmare.)

City of Heroes is a sharp-looking game that doesn't try to lead the MMORPG genre away from its obsession with combat. Instead, it makes that combat arguably more entertaining than any other



MMORPG, with a style and speed more like *Diablo* than *EverQuest*. Now, it's up to Cryptic to keep the gameplay fresh enough to justify charging 15 smackers a month.

—Zach Meston



Rating
8
10

Hitman: Contracts

He'll do anything for money

Publisher Eidos | Developer IO Interactive | Genre Stealth Action | ESRB M | Format PC, PS2, Xbox



While the third installment in the *Hitman* series follows the same blueprint of its predecessors, namely stealth action mixed with blood and gore, Eidos is trying to make the experience a bit more cerebral with *Hitman: Contracts*. As the bald Agent 47, you are once again the strong, silent killer hired to end the lives of bad, bad men.

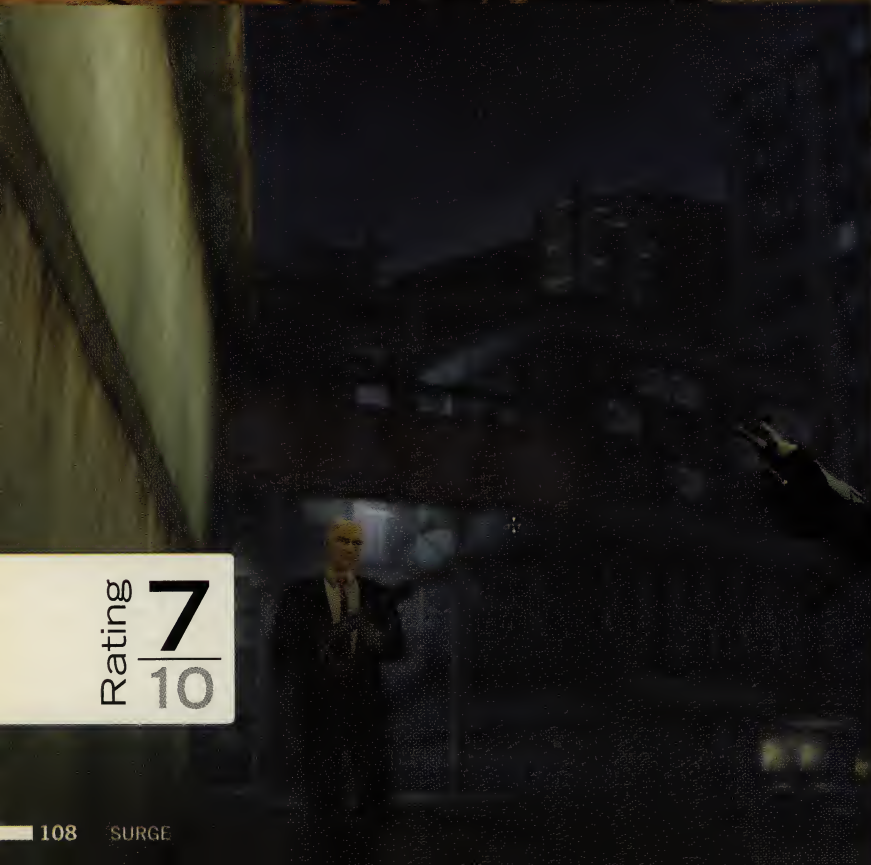
Beginning with a dream-like level that leads to a secret laboratory gone haywire, *Contracts* eventually moves on to slightly more exotic locations, like Paris, Hong Kong, Siberia, and England. The scenery, no matter where you are, is rich, if not particularly dark. The main difference with these environments is what Eidos has billed "improvisational weaponry," which is basically the ability to pick up any number of objects, from meat hooks to shovels, and use them as weapons. The usually stellar AI hasn't wavered.

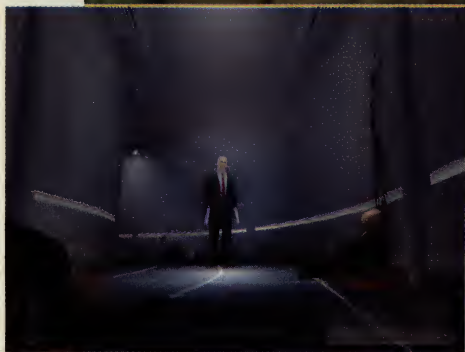
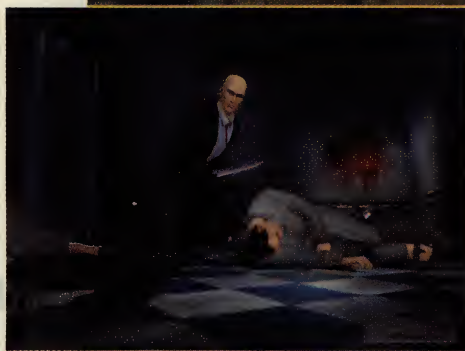
With a variety of weapons and firearms, as well as a multitude of practical tools, it's tempting to ignore the stealth aspect of this game and just go balls out, but you'll pay the price. The key here, whether trading clothes with your victims or dragging their sorry bodies into a nearby closet, is to not blow your cover, something that proves increasingly difficult as the levels progress. It takes a while to pick up the gameplay and find the best way to lay low, but fans of previous *Hitman* titles know the drill and shouldn't have quite as much trouble as a newbie.

While the gameplay and controls were occasionally epithet-inducing, the aesthetic cultivated in previous titles shines through here: the levels are dark, the characters are ruthless, and the gore, which can be disabled in options, is particularly high. A new gaming engine and a stellar score from Jesper Kyd makes this installment far more cinematic and psychological. In what could easily be interpreted as an overcomplicated third-person action romp, *Hitman: Contracts* brings more to the table, but even at the easiest playing level, it proves a difficult task.

—TP

Rating
7
10





The Rating Game

We hired a top team of think tank intellectuals to devise the Best Rating System in the World. After reading the 300-volume work we paid them millions of dollars to create, we canned that calculus-ridden crap for the 0 to 10 point scale. Those responsible for the report have been sacked.

While rating the game, we take into account the graphics, sound, replay value, gameplay, and story. The final score is a reflection of the total game experience.

10 The Holy Grail, la pièce de résistance, everything you wanted it to be and more, etc.

9 A great game by any standard, though not the best of its kind. If this game were a quarterback, it would be Dan Marino—great numbers, no championship ring.

8 The "controversy" rating. Hardcore genre fans may scream bloody murder that the rating isn't higher, and passive gamers may think the game doesn't deserve the rating.

7 A solid effort that lacks any real innovation, or an innovative game that lacks a solid gameplay experience. Take your pick.

6 You may get a few solid hours out of this game during a rental, but it's definitely not worth 50 bucks.

5 to 3 The "irony" rating. The game is so bad it's gone past good and back to bad again.

1 & 2 Poking a dead rat with a stick would be more entertaining.

The Executioner

Every so often a game that should have been stillborn slithers its way to store shelves, ready to prey upon unsuspecting victims.

The Executioner is here to return the game from whence it came.



ESRB Ratings

EC- Early Childhood

You know—unicorns, rainbows, and other things that entertain and educate little rug rats or Japanese teenagers.

E- Everyone

This is a family-friendly game with an abundance of wholesome fun. Some parents call these games "babysitters."

T- Teen

These games have been known to crack one or two skulls along the path to victory.

M- Mature

Hookers, drugs, bloodshed, and sailor talk all rolled into one firebomb of a game. Long live the American Dream.

AO- Adults Only

Reserved for only the raunchiest of titles. The XXX of gaming.

RP- Rating Pending

Some aren't doing their job fast enough.

La Pucelle: Tactics

Strategerize!

Publisher Mastiff LLC | Developer Nippon Ichi | Genre Strategy RPG | ESRB RP | Format PS2



While the Game Boy Advance has been hogging more than its fair share of good strategy games lately, the PlayStation 2 is about to get in on the action with *La Pucelle: Tactics*. It's the spiritual sequel to the cult hit *Disgaea: Hour of Darkness*, although it actually preceded that game in Japan.

The storyline revolves around a party of demon hunters and one particular hunter's journey to become the "Maiden of Light." The meat of the gameplay is in hundreds of area maps. Each map generally represents one room in a dungeon that, once cleared, lets you pass through freely. There are different conditions to fulfill in certain maps, although the typical destroy-all-enemies objective is prevalent.

Battlefields feature terrain elements called Dark Portals that spawn enemies. Members of your squad can purify these portals and redirect the energy path from them. Upon purification, all enemies in the path of the portal will take some sort of elemental damage. The strategy is to create a circuit that encloses 15 or more squares on the map before you purify the portal. This creates a "miracle," a summon spell that damages all enemies inside the enclosed region.

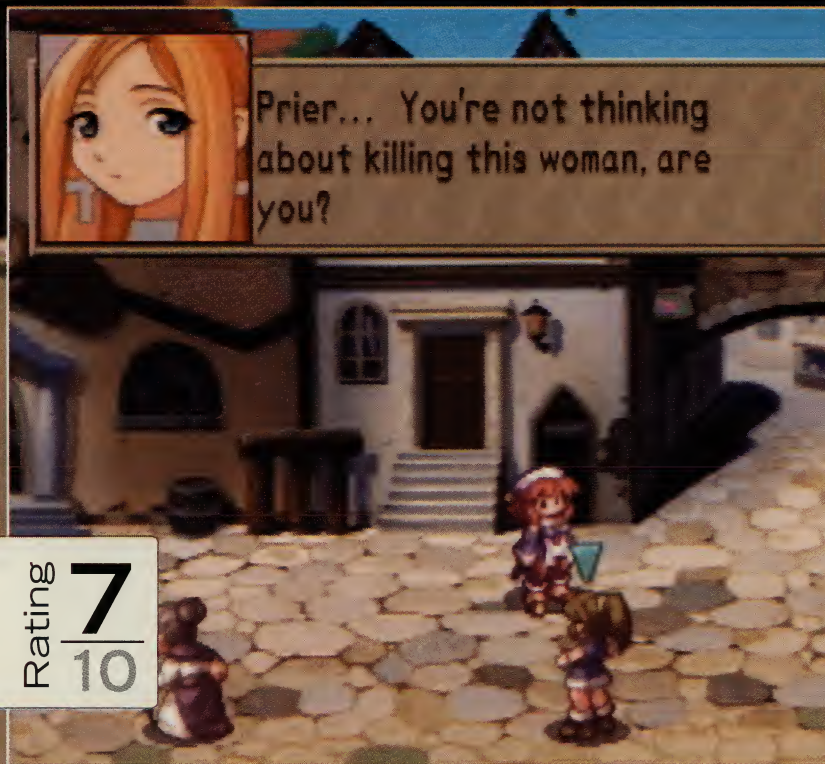
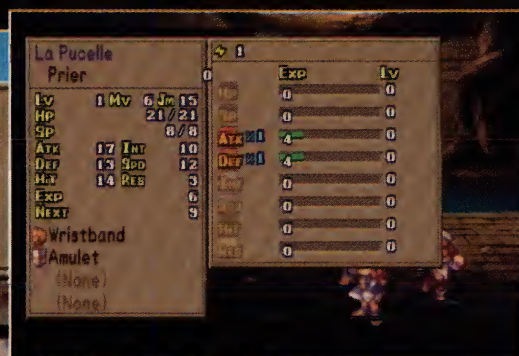
The purification elements extend to enemies, as well, and they sometimes result in the enemy joining

your side. This allows you to place them on the board as one of your units.

The artwork is Manga-styled, and the backgrounds are all gorgeously hand-drawn. The voiceovers and music are about what'd you'd expect from a game of this type, slightly annoying, but not deal breaking.

The complex gameplay will likely put off the fans of the pick-up-and-go style of *Advance Wars* or *Fire Emblem*, but hardcore gamers will delight in dropping weeks into this quirky Japanese title.

—James Stevenson



Rating
7
10

Lineage II

What's Korean for Electric Boogaloo?

Publisher NCsoft | Developer NCsoft | Genre MMORPG | ESRB T | Format PC

The original *Lineage* remains the world's most popular MMORPG, thanks to the unique cultural circumstances surrounding the Korean "PC bangs" in which it's played—despite its overwhelming mediocrity. *Lineage II* ditches the horrendous 2D graphics of its predecessor for glorious 3D visuals via the Unreal engine, but the rest of the gameplay hasn't enjoyed any technical advances; other than a couple of tweaks and additions, this is damn near the same game as *Lineage*. (As if we expected drastic changes to a successful formula?)

The character-creation process is embarrassingly simple; pick one of five races, one of two classes

(additional classes open up when you reach levels 20 and 40), and "customize" yourself with a puny number of faces and bodies. The newbie tutorial is very rough, suffering from "Engrish" translation (as does much of the in-game text) and assuming some familiarity with the genre, which defeats the whole point of a tutorial.

Exactly two aspects of *Lineage II* rise above typical MMORPG gameplay. The first: bi-weekly castle sieges. Guilds fight for control of one of the game's half-dozen big ol' structures, which bestow financial bennies on their possessors. Second, guild leaders ride full-grown dragons, raining fire and Yugo-sized scat upon their foes—a very tasty perk.

Lineage II emphasizes player-vs.-player combat, which means that it's overrun with acne-scarred, Taco Bell-bloated, Mom's-basement-dwelling griefers whose respective existences revolve around making your gameplay experience as miserable as their lives. They do a damn fine job of it.

If you're itching for a competitive online game set in a fantasy realm with spells and swords, then this may be your bag. *Lineage II* will be a smash hit in Asia thanks to its pedigree, but it's nowhere near as technically adept or as multifaceted as any entry in the flood of American MMORPGs coming later this year.

—ZM



Rating
6
10

Onimusha 3: Demon Siege

Face your demons

Publisher Capcom | Developer Capcom | Genre Action | ESRB M | Format PS2

Capcom does period demon slaying better than anyone else, and the *Onimusha* series has created a legitimate fan club for brooding hero Samanosuke. *Demon Siege* ups the ante by throwing actor Jean Reno into the proven mix of combat, outrageous enemy design, and splashy CGI cut scenes. Samanosuke is here, too, armed as always with a versatile set of ever-more powerful sword combos. Reno, as the unapologetically French military officer Jacques Blanc, is the game's magnetic center. Armed with a whip-like weapon stolen from the Belmont clan, this paramilitary expert is impressive and a hell of a lot of fun to play.

The new levels mark the series' transition into full 3D, and the new digs shine, especially when pumped out over a component connection. The hook-nosed Reno is perfectly recognizable, and his character model is the highpoint in an already impressive cast. Half the environments retain the

basic flavor of retro-techno Japan that define *Onimusha*, but the balance, set on the streets of Paris, is a new step for the game, and the 3D renderings suit all the locations well. With the new dimension come more appealing platforming and straight action, accentuated by a mixture of fixed and roving cameras that nail the action 95 percent of the time.

Typically, CGI scenes aren't worth commenting on, but these are sublime, rivaling the brilliant work done in *Ninja Gaiden*. In fact, the only thing keeping *Onimusha 3* from standing as the pure PS2 answer to Tecmo's masterpiece is its lack of wall-walking ninja skills. In every other respect, *Demon Siege* offers story, combat, and a deep, challenging upgrade system that's just as satisfying as anything the genre has to offer.

—Russ Fischer



Rating
8
10



Onimusha Blade Warriors

One weak katana

Publisher Capcom | Developer Capcom | Genre Fighter | ESRB T | Format PS2

Oh, *Super Smash Bros.*, why hast thou forsaken us? Actually, the more relevant question is, "Hey, Capcom, what's with screwing audiences over?"

Blade Warriors, a limp-wristed brawler, pales even against the company's own Dreamcast blockbuster, *PowerStone*. It's hardly the multiplayer sensation we hoped the big C would deliver.

Ironically, the title ships as a character-driven dustup that features a dozen personalities few know or care about. While the offered personas include the familiar (Jubei, Samanosuke, Nobunaga) and the obscure (three-eyes, zombie, etc.), none will inspire even the faintest empathy from players. It makes pounding the crap out of each individual (using kicks, swipes, and charged attacks) much easier, yet it renders the experience nowhere near fulfilling.

Leaping about semi-attractive playfields that include pastoral Japanese settings and majestic temples, the goal is simple: cane all opponents. It's easier said than done. Multiple elevations and randomly generated power-ups like sledgehammers, laser guns, and magic spells complicate the process. If you defeat your rivals, you can collect their souls, which provides upgrades that make the task less demanding.

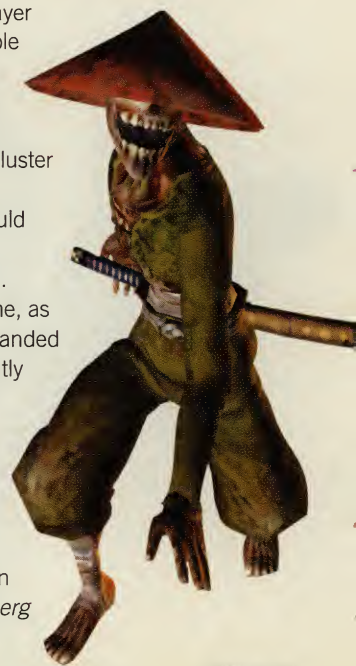
As pleasing as the presentation and in-game mechanics are, the experience ultimately comes up short. Despite the inclusion of a



Rating
4
10

bare-bones story mode, you'll spend the most time butting heads with up to three friends in repetitious player-vs.-player scenarios. Though enjoyable in small sittings, such bouts fail miserably as a long-term diversion due to limited move sets and lackluster level planning.

Franchise admirers should give the product a rental, but only for comedy's sake. As is obvious with this game, as opposed to the properly branded *Onimusha 3* sequel currently in the offing, dallying with a series spin-off—let alone an obvious cash-in—is an utter waste of time. Spare yourself the trauma and stick with the survival horror rendition instead. —Scott Steinberg





CMP

United Business Media

NEW LOOK * NEW COLUMNS * NEW INSIGHTS

game developer

THE LEADING GAME INDUSTRY MAGAZINE

» APPLY FOR A
FREE SUBSCRIPTION
(\$71.40 NEWSSTAND PRICE)

» WWW.GDMAG.COM/FREEYEAR

» SUBSCRIPTION
INQUIRIES:
1-800-250-2429

THE
LEADING MAGAZINE
FOR THE
PROFESSIONAL
GAME
INDUSTRY



Painkiller

This may hurt a bit

Publisher DreamCatcher | Developer People Can Fly | Genre FPS | ESRB M | Format PC (available now), Xbox (Winter release)



Most priests will tell you purgatory isn't supposed to be fun, but they've obviously never consulted with People Can Fly. As Daniel Garner in *Painkiller*, God's messenger man offers you a simple assignment to gain entrance to Heaven: frag everything that moves. More specifically, you're supposed to take out Satan's generals, who are preparing an attack on H-town. Sounds like fun to us.

Rekindling the frantic, gorefest tradition of *Doom* and *Quake*, *Painkiller* offers a break from today's tactical shooters for some good old trigger-finger exercise. Hardly a moment will go by without the pleasant sounds of your gun firing and demons screaming in agony as you return them to their sender. The story is nonexistent during gameplay, but the rather lengthy, expository cut-scenes rob the game of its pace. Embedded storytelling à la *Halo* or *Far Cry* would have helped the script feel less jarring.

If ever a game were officially endorsed by the death metal community, *Painkiller* would be the obvious choice. Benedictine monks chant as you make your way through the environments—until the enemies appear. Then, the double bass drums and

Rating
7
10

monster guitar riffs kick in, and you rock your way through the hordes of demons. The weapons at your disposal may be few in number, but they are certainly entertaining. The stake gun, which shoots giant wooden stakes at your enemies and pins them to the surroundings, may be the weapon of the year.

As environments go, purgatory is a diverse and amazing-looking waiting room. You'll be taking out the army of darkness in locales as varied as cemeteries, cathedrals, and cities reminiscent of Venice. You and the demons seem to be the only residents though, so don't expect any help during your quest.

In the end, *Painkiller* is a welcome return to an FPS style of yore. Though you won't mistake the game for an innovative leap in the genre, its nostalgia is pervasive enough to keep the game fun. —MB



Resident Evil: Outbreak

Dawn of the online dead

Publisher Capcom | Developer Capcom | Genre Survival Horror | ESRB M | Format PS2



Capcom's survival horror standby has been aging less than gracefully, but *Outbreak* finally pushes the formula forward, thanks to interesting online squad gameplay. Kicking the timeline back to the original zombie infestation of Raccoon City, five interlinked scenarios revolve around a cast of eight playable ordinary Joes caught amidst the

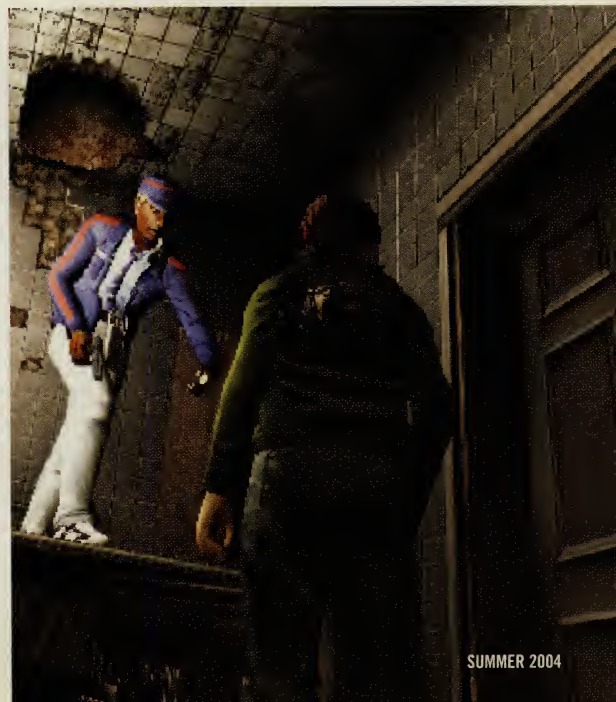
undead plague. Up to four players form a ragtag band of citizens, all racing against a ticking viral clock that threatens to turn all and sundry into walking corpses. Fallen players return as controllable zombies, which is a treat, but cooperating to keep that from happening is more fun.

Every character has a unique possession and ability, and the balance between each is surprisingly tight. The AI that powers them when playing offline is diminished, however, making solo outings less than stellar. That said, playing offline is essential for learning layouts and puzzles. Without that foundation, it's easy for the undead to eat you alive online. More story would be welcome, as would downloadable updates to replace the routine of mastered traps. The real attraction is the highly variable interaction of strangers online; the vagaries that crop up can't be matched by the offline AI.

Outbreak is consistently entertaining, if rarely frightening. It looks good, retaining the forced camera angles of the past, and its new inventory system is far easier to use than the crippling object management of yesteryear. Characters can trade items, many of which combine to form new weapons and medicine. The primary letdown is the communication system, which eschews voice chat in favor of a preprogrammed phrase book for every player. The idea is obviously to amplify the tension of staring down a zombie horde, but the inability to communicate properly is more frustrating than exciting. Communication breakdown aside, *Outbreak* is essential for series fans and little more than a curiosity for everyone else. —RF



Rating
7
10



Sacred

Diablo's red-headed step-brother

Publisher Encore | Developer Ascaron GmbH | Genre Action RPG | ESRB T | Format PC



Sit, Ubu, sit. Good dog.



a hack-and-slash RPG and complaining about the feeble plot is like chugging a bottle of Drano and complaining of a tummy ache.

Sacred's setting includes few dungeons, which makes for a nice visual change of pace, unless you enjoy the mole-man lifestyle that most hack-and-slashers provide. There are both mandatory and optional quests, the latter being the usual array of FedEx deliveries, rescues, and genocidal rampages. Alas, many optional quests are literally impossible to complete, thanks to incredibly buggy programming, which is most obvious in the online multiplayer mode.

One of *Sacred's* few moments of originality is the ability to ride horses around the landscape, which shortens your travel time and improves your defensive strength. However, it's very difficult to attack on horseback, and you're not allowed to access many of each character's best skills, which limits its usefulness.

In fact, it's difficult to attack no matter what the situation, a rather fundamental flaw in a hack-and-slasher. Your character will often stop attacking for no discernible reason, and you don't get a good feel for when your attacks are landing. What's worse, the original European version of the game had blood and guts, but Encore had the carnage removed to secure a T rating. Did we somehow miss the public outcry for family-friendly hack-and-slashers?

Sacred is a mediocre RPG: deeper than *Diablo*, but simply not as much fun.

—ZM

Sacred is a hack-and-slash RPG that quite obviously takes its gameplay cues from *Diablo*. It incorporates a few additions and alterations and focuses more on character development, but its flaws and bugs detract from the simple (and we do mean simple) joy of slaughtering thousands of monsters.

At the start of the game, after choosing one of six character types, you drop into the realm of Ancaria, where—and our apologies in advance for revealing this shocking plot development—the forces of evil are trying to take over the world. Then again, playing



Rating
6
10

Seven Samurai 20XX

It's seppuku for this Kurosawa update

Publisher Sammy Studios | Developer DIMPS | Genre Action | ESRB T | Format PS2

You can't just throw Akira Kurosawa's name around like he was Alan Smithee. The guy's a legend, and anything that bears the name of his masterpiece has got to live up to some seriously high standards. So, many gamers uttered sarcastic remarks when Sammy Studios announced the inevitable update to the classic 1953 samurai film. As expected, the game falls short of the original. More a roving slashfest than

dominate, and anyone seeking a treatise on the moral use of power should look elsewhere.

If the story and characters aren't a match for Kurosawa, at least the game looks incredible. As roving third-person action goes, there's not much on the PS2 to top 20XX's presentation, which shows off great character design (by comics sensei Moebius) and enough over-the-top battle effects to make



anything else, this *Seven Samurai* throws players behind the scabbard of Natoe, a futuristic warrior on a collision course with drunken fate. There's a story about protecting innocents and recruiting aid that recalls the film, but mostly the emphasis is on endless combat and incredible combos. The flashy two swords technique and archaic arcade attacks

Square jealous. If only it wasn't compromised by the most egregious loading screens we've seen in an age, which come one after the other like ants on the march. Saddled with any other moniker, this would be a solid but unremarkable action rental. Instead, it's a slightly pretentious action rental, fit only for the pathologically twitchy.

—RF

Rating
4
10

Siren

The eternal battle versus zombies, fog

Publisher SCEA | Developer SCEA | Genre Survival Horror | ESRB M | Format PS2

Siren marks Sony's foray into the survival horror genre. It tells of a small village in Japan where "shibito" (Japanese for "living dead") walk the Earth. Seen through the eyes of ten characters, *Siren* immerses players into a continual fight for survival in a variety of scenarios.

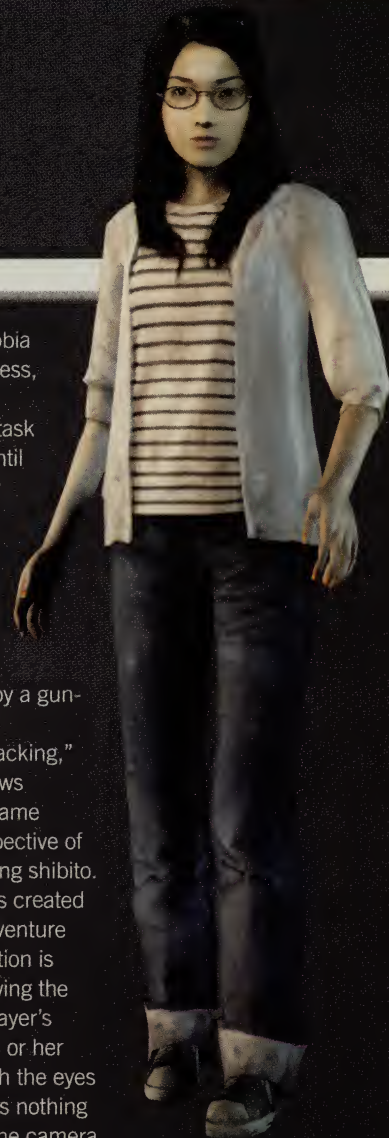
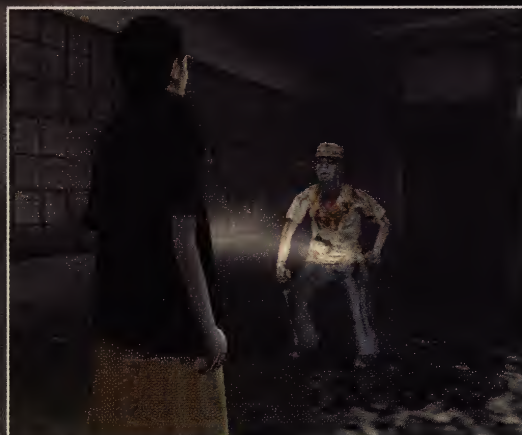
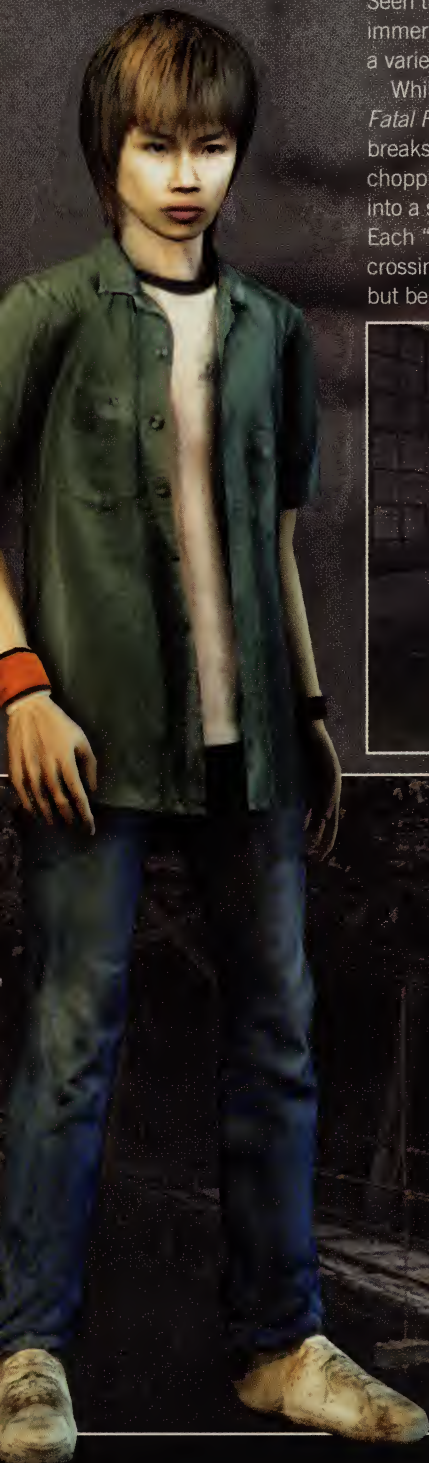
While it would be easy to compare this title to *Fatal Frame*, *Silent Hill*, or *Resident Evil*, *Siren* breaks away from traditional survival horror titles by chopping both the puzzles and the game's narrative into a seemingly random progression of small pieces. Each "level" consists of a tiny task to perform, like crossing a bridge or restarting a power generator, but because the game possesses an incredible

sense of claustrophobia brought on by darkness, fog, and unknown surroundings, each task feels monumental until players know exactly how it's achieved. Even running for one's life is a death sentence; players must choose every move with care, lest they be sniped by a gun-wielding ghoul.

Siren uses "sightjacking," a mechanic that allows players to view the game world from the perspective of wandering or attacking shibito. In essence, Sony has created a second-person adventure game where exploration is achieved not by viewing the world through the player's character or over his or her shoulder, but through the eyes of the enemy. There's nothing quite like watching the camera hobble towards the back of your own head with a sickle in hand.

The interface is original; Choices like "Put key in ignition" appear onscreen, as does a calendar, so players can track their progress through the game. While *Siren* is certainly innovative, survival horror fans might find that death comes too quickly and too often for their liking.

—Doug Trueman



Rating
7
10

Splinter Cell Pandora Tomorrow

Come for the single player, stay for the multiplayer

Publisher Ubisoft | Developer Ubisoft Montreal | Genre Action | ESRB T | Format PC, Xbox



Rating
8
10

When you have a title as pervasive and hugely popular as *Splinter Cell*, it is difficult to present a sequel to the gaming public unless it looks like a simple add-on or expansion pack. Ubisoft, however, maintains the fantastic stealth action gameplay of the original while introducing new and innovative multiplayer modes. Through an impressively clever design, *Pandora Tomorrow* includes a new multiplayer

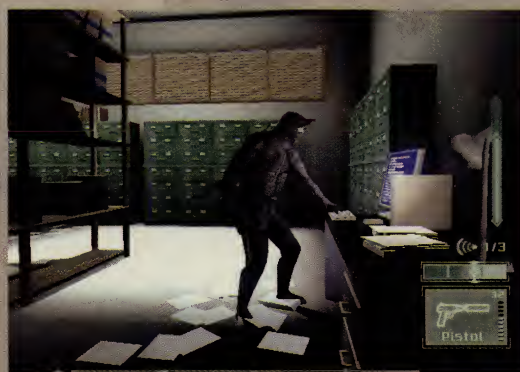
mode in the single-player storyline, keeping the two separate, but intact.

Once again, you'll be playing the part of Sam Fisher, the ruthless secret agent poised to save the world from biological-weapon-toting guerillas. That means making your way to a number of exotic outdoor locales, which are significantly richer and more vibrant than in the first *Splinter Cell*. The gameplay isn't as linear as the first, either; Fisher can work his way through environments with a variety of tactics. One of the early levels, which takes place mostly on a moving train, shows off the game's expanded usability, allowing you to baby-step (and crawl and climb and rappel) your way through Fisher's new moves to reach his objective. That's good, because for the uninitiated it could take up to an hour to figure out what is going on. If your most cerebral gaming accomplishment is throwing a lateral pass in *Madden*, you'll need time to adapt to *Splinter Cell*. Fortunately for newbies, the enemy AI hasn't improved drastically.

If nabbing data surreptitiously isn't enough action for you, try *Pandora Tomorrow's* new multiplayer mode, the first to feature first-person-vs.-third-person action. On the FPS side you can play an armed-to-the-gills mercenary who faces off against stealthy third-person perspective agents. Each group has its pros and cons that need to be considered; mercenaries have considerable firepower, but the agents have a bigger field of vision and are much quicker. This new gameplay is what ultimately makes *Pandora Tomorrow* more than just an expansion pack.

Are we witnessing the birth of another gaming dynasty? Only time will tell, but you can bet we'll be seeing Sam Fisher again real soon.

—TP



Transformers

Don't call it a comeback

Publisher Atari | Developer Atari | Genre Action/Shooter | ESRB T | Format PS2

With all the branding going on in the gaming world, word of a *Transformers* action title more than likely will lead many purists to roll their eyes with skepticism. Yet, Atari has made more of an effort than a number of its counterparts in bringing *Transformers* to the console, and this game is definitely more than meets the eye.

With a multitude of levels, the game is aesthetically impressive. As one of three Autobot protagonists, including the ultimate Transformer, Optimus Prime himself, you'll make your way through the Amazon and Antarctica, as well as environments not of this planet. The storyline itself is a little flat, as you battle a number of Mini-Cons, eventually taking on formidable bosses like Tidal Wave and Unicron.

The game can be really fun to look at, and the opportunity to transform from robot to truck is too good to pass up for anyone raised on 1980s cartoons. Speaking of which, game unlockables include classic public service announcements from the cartoon, which are always a memory trip to watch. Once you get past these kitschy aspects of *Transformers*, the game drops off slightly.

The levels sprawl endlessly—to a fault. They are lush and can be fun to explore, but for an action game in which you can go

several minutes without confronting enemies, it gets a little tiring if you aren't completely familiar with the level. *Transformers* purists might be disappointed that most of their favorite characters from the 1980s are not in the game. Maybe it's a show of scruples by Atari, not banking on nostalgia to completely make the game. Expect to see the occasional Dinobot here and Destructicon there, but in the gameplay, it doesn't exactly endear itself to players. —TP



Rating
7
10

Unreal Tournament 2004

A multiplayer masterpiece?

Publisher Atari | Developer Epic Games | Genre FPS | ESRB M | Format PC

If you're not into the military-based historical shooters pervading the online FPS community, with *Unreal Tournament 2004* you have a legitimate, and in some ways better, alternative.

With its fast-paced, blood-sport-style multiplayer action and multitude of amazing game modes and maps, *Unreal* is the best competitive gaming package on the market today. Whether you're into Deathmatch, Team Deathmatch, or more drawn out and strategic modes like Assault and Onslaught, you can't go wrong. The new Onslaught mode is a hybrid of a push map and the Conquest mode in the *Battlefield* series; you must work with your team to take control of power nodes in a specific order as you strive to destroy the enemy's base.

Onslaught introduces vehicles to the *UT* universe. From tanks to hovercrafts to light aircraft, each of the vehicles operates much easier than the *Battlefield* counterparts. Though you could spend a week learning how to fly the touchy choppers in *BF*

Vietnam, the flight-based vehicles in *Unreal* are so easy to fly you'll be carpet bombing foot soldiers with precision after your first few battles.

It's a marvel that a game this beautiful can support such robust online modes with up to 32 players. From the lush grass fields to the finely detailed industrial backdrops, the graphics in *UT2004* far surpass any other shooter that supports such big battles. *UT2004* marks the triumphant return of the sniper rifle, which rightly takes its place within the amazingly varied arsenals provided at spawn points throughout the maps. To combat the new threat of vehicles to ground troops, Epic included the AVRIL, a heat-seeking weapon, and spider mines.

Epic Games did the single-player mode justice, where you work your way up a tournament ladder against the best AI bots known to man, teaming up with fallen enemies on your rise to the top. Though it takes a while to get to the interesting game modes, it's a much better alternative than the competition.

Any way you look at it, *UT2004* is a winner. —MB



Rating
9
10



UFC: Sudden Impact

We wear short shorts

Publisher Global Star | Software Developer Opus | Genre Fighting | ESRB T | Format PS2

The Ultimate Fighting Championship has made its way back to the PlayStation 2, this time with a new story mode. Don't get your hopes up; Global Star is publishing this budget title, and it only has budget improvements over *UFC: Throwdown*.

Anyone who has played a *UFC* game knows exactly what to expect. The buttons each allow you to throw an attack with a specific limb. There are plenty of grappling and wrestling moves in the game, as well, and much of the game finds both fighters on the ground grappling for position. All the traditional modes are back: versus, champion road, tournament, and arcade. Woo hoo.

If there is a highlight in this subpar game, it's the new story mode, which allows players to create and customize their own fighters, down to details like intro music, costume, and tattoos, and take them on a journey toward pay-per-view greatness. The story mode explains that a talent scout has spotted

your fighter (presumably during a fight). You spend three years at different dojos (each specializes in a different fighting style). Every month you have the opportunity to focus train to increase certain attributes or learn new moves. Failure to learn the new move properly gives you a weaker version of the move or a weaker stat upgrade. Other events, like punching bag challenges and a few tournaments, round out the story experience.

After putting three years into training, gamers will discover the story mode suddenly ends and they have to take their new fighter to the other modes in the game. It's an utter disappointment: an over glorified create-a-player mode with no real story included. The graphics and gameplay are disappointing and seem recycled, as does the music.

Fans might be interested in the cheap price tag, but the only thing that will impact you about the game is how suddenly you stop playing it. —JS



Rating

3
10

Van Helsing

Mary Shelley's nightmare

Publisher Vivendi Universal | Developer Saffire | Genre Action | ESRB T | Format PS2, Xbox



It's like your darkest tree house desires come true: a ripped, heroic Van Helsing facing off against the best and baddest in the Universal Studios horror encyclopedia. This is gothic action through and through, cut straight from the *Devil May Cry* mold with combos that juggle like Cirque de Soleil and cinematic camera views that hopefully won't remind you too much of the movie. With his eccentric outfit and old-school weapons (the hand-cranked Gatling gun kind of rocks) this vampire hunter is more swashbuckler than cranky historian, and the storyline investigates his dusty past.

Most of that dust comes from the soon-to-be-deceased hides of your enemies. Van Helsing's eight weapons create some fantastic combat based on high-count combos and special moves that will have cries of "Finish him!" echoing in living rooms. Certain skills and weapons create unique, flashy kills that are just fun enough to justify playing on. But the weapons almost come second to the monster hunter's grappling hook, a piece of gear that seems to be all the rage, no matter the time period. Part travel device, part puzzle solution, and simply a good time, the grapple is a well implemented, integral part of the proceedings, rather than a spiky novelty.

Experienced players will no doubt have Dante flashbacks while slaying demonic beasts, but *Van Helsing* is fun enough that it doesn't matter. With a capable graphics engine that pumps out appropriately buttressed geometry, this is better looking and smoother than Capcom's devilish fighter. Add an effective score and the result is a derivative but entertaining monster stew that'll probably stay on shelves longer than its cinematic inspiration. —RF



Rating
6
10

The Shin-ing

Lovable popsters **The Shins** on their success, road life, and—of course—Halo.

Do you play a lot of video games while out on the road?

James Mercer: Marty [Crandall, our guitar player] is actually a videogame nut. I play games, too. Right now I've been playing *Castlevania: Aria of Sorrow* on Game Boy. I'm pretty good at it, I guess. I'm really fucking good at *Halo*.

Marty Crandall: I have my Game Boy Advance, so I'm playing a game called *Fire Emblem*. I love those military, long, sweep-the-globe-and-take-over kind of games. They're addictive, they take over. We'll take stops for gas, and I'll still be in there. It'll be time to go, and I'll realize I need to go to the bathroom or I haven't eaten. I have four games, but that's always the one that I keep [on playing]. That, and *Dr. Mario*.

Is it true that James is "really fucking good at Halo?"

MC: Yeah, that is something that he is really good at; that's a really good four-player game. We all go nuts with that one. A full-on Shins battle.

Nice. Do you have an Xbox that you bring out on tour with you?

JM: Yeah, we actually got one as a present from [our record label] Sub Pop, and then a guy who worked for Xbox who came and saw us play gave us like 20 free games.

So, you guys are getting pretty big—you're finally getting cool stuff you need.

JM: Yeah, it's cool.

Have you ever missed a band practice because of your obsession?

MC: No, but we've always practiced in a house where I have something hooked up.

Marty, I heard you used to work at a GameStop.

MC: I did. It was basically just to get a discount.

We completely understand.

—David Crohn



POLYWELL SYSTEMS

Polywell Monster the Best of its Class



AMD delivers
high-performance
system solutions
for today's
gaming community.

The ONLY
Windows-compatible
64-bit PC processor!

Smashing the Barriers
of 32-bit Gaming!



Graphics to Drench
Your Senses

800.664.8917



POLY 900VF 64-bit Performance PC

AMD Athlon™ 64 3200+ Processor
with Hyper Transport™ Technology
upto 1600MHz System Bus
512MB DDR memory (Exp. to 3GB)
200GB Internal ATA Hard Drive
Sony DVD-RW/CDRW Combo Drive
Nvidia GeForce™ FX 5900XT 8X Graphics
19" High-Res.21mm Graphics Monitor
On-board Integrated 6-Ch. Sound
with Subwoofer Speakers Set
100bit LAN, 1394 Firewire, 5 x 3D Games
MS® Windows® XP Home CD and License
Small Portable Case Easy for LAN Party
\$1,599 SKU# QBoxNF3SUR0405A

POLY 900NF3-FX The Monster Gaming PC

AMD Athlon™ 64 FX-53 Processor
with Hyper Transport™ Technology
upto 1600MHz System Bus
1GB DDR ECC memory (Exp. to 8GB)
10000RPM 36G SATA+ 200G 7200RPM ATA
DVD-RW Combo, high speed CDRW
Nvidia GeForce™ 6800 8XAGP Graphics
19" High-Res.21mm Graphics Monitor
Sound Blaster Audigy2 ZS 7.1 Sound
Creative T7700 7.1 Subwoofer Speakers
100bit Ethernet, 1394 Firewire, USB2.0
Windows® XP Home CD and License
Monster Gaming Tower w/400W P/S
\$2,999 SKU# FX53SUR0405B



Ask us about the
Special 64-bit **FARCRY**
Bundle Option!



First Class Customer Services
www.Polywell.com/us/game

15 Years of Customer Satisfaction
American Made Computers

Polywell Computers, Inc 1461 San Mateo Avenue South San Francisco CA 94080 650.583.7222 Fax: 650.583.1974

AMD and Athlon are trademarks of Advanced Micro Devices, Inc. Nvidia and GeForce are trademarks of Nvidia Corporation. All other brands, names are trademarks of their respective companies.

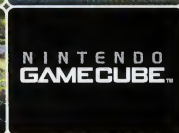
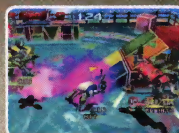
who are you?



The way we customize our things says a lot about who we are. Like selecting a dragon gun for a battle robot says, "I'm gonna reduce you to a pile of scrap." In Custom Robo™, choose from over 200 parts to create and send the ultimate combat robo into battle against any who dare oppose you.



Comic Mischief
Mild Fantasy Violence



© 2004 NOISE/Nintendo.TM. ® and the Nintendo GameCube logo are trademarks of Nintendo. © 2004 Nintendo. www.nintendo.com